

# socialist worker Review

December 1984

Issue 71 60p



## RATE CAPPING A TORY TIME BOMB



**NOTES OF THE MONTH**

Miners, Kinnock, Class struggle, Equal pay, Ireland, North  
London Poly

**WORKPLACE NOTES**

John Dieson talks about how to operate as a shop steward

**WHAT DO WE MEAN BY Exploitation**

Dave Fysh explains

**DIVISIONS IN THE BROAD LEFT**

Kieran Kelly looks at the recent split inside the CPSA Broad Left, and Sally  
Bild shows how the left in the union grew

**HUNGRY FOR PROFIT**

The real story behind the famine by Alan Gibson

3

8

10

12

14

---

**RATE CAPPING: THE TORY TIME BOMB**

Gareth Jenkins explains the background to what could be one of the biggest  
issues of 1985.

16

**IRELAND: THE MISSING KEY**

What are the prospects for revolution in Ireland? Chris Harman reviews a new  
book about communism in Ireland and explains.

20

---

**FIGHTING APARTHEID**

What's going on in South Africa? Alex Callinicos gives a rundown on recent  
events

23

**DENG'S ROAD WEST**

The changes in China, described by Martin May.

24

**BORIS SOUVARINE**

Philip Spencer writes an obituary of an early French communist.

26

**WRITERS REVIEWED**

Norman Strike reviews the novels of Lewis Jones, who wrote about the life of  
miners in South Wales.

27

**REVIEWS AND LETTERS**

28

**Edited by Lindsey German**

**Assisted by** Jane Basset, Pat  
Stack, Gareth Jenkins, Andy  
Zebrowski, Pete Goodwin, Dave  
Beecham, Sue Cockerill, Noel  
Halifax, Norah Carlin, Laurence  
Wong, John Deason, Mark  
Cranshaw, Cathie Jasper and  
Lindsay Greig.

**Production and business** Pat

Stack, Rob Ferguson

**Reviews** Colin Sparks

Subscription rate for one year:

Britain and Ireland £8 Overseas

surface £9 Europe Air £11

Elsewhere Air £14.50

(institutions add £7.50)

Cheques and postal orders

payable to Socialist Review.

Socialist Worker Review is sent

free to all prisoners on request.

ISSN 0141 2442

Printed by Laneridge Ltd (TU all  
depts) London E2.

# NOTES

## of the month

### MINERS

# Christmas and beyond

THE government is stepping up the propaganda war. It hopes that it can convince many wavering miners—and those outside the mining areas who support the strike—that the strike is a completely lost cause, and that those who don't go back to work are merely prolonging their own misery.

Thatcher and her supporters are claiming categorically that Arthur Scargill and the miners cannot win. This is a message repeated throughout the press, although it is never substantiated by any hard facts.

The government and the coal board have been given great assistance in this task by the disgusting behaviour of Neil Kinnock and Norman Willis.

In the very week when the coal board were redoubling their efforts to break the strike, with their Christmas bribe, both Kinnock and Willis deliberately and publicly dissociated themselves from the strikers.

For all their subsequent reaffirmations of support, their appeals for a 'surge' back to the negotiating table—at a time when the coal board insist that talks will only result when the NUM agree to pit closures on economic grounds—has only assisted the Tories' attempts to get a 'surge' back to work. In doing so they have created immense damage.

So far only a small minority of miners in the striking areas have been tempted to cross picket lines.

Even the coal board have been forced to admit that they expect the bulk of the miners to be out on strike at least until after Christmas.

But obviously any return to work is a real setback and likely to have an effect on the morale of striking miners, especially those in the more isolated areas.

So what is the real situation with the strike, and how can it be strengthened?

A number of factors have created the return. Firstly, management have put real

resources into orchestrating the back to work move, especially in the borderline area of North Derbyshire.

After nine months on strike, the very real hardship experienced by the miners and their families has obviously been a major factor in the drift. The passivity of the strike, where only a minority have been involved in picketing, delegations and other activity, has allowed doubt about the strike to grow in the minds of individual miners.

The back-to-work move *on its own* is not decisive in terms of the strike. But it does have a weakening effect in two ways.

Firstly, it makes solidarity from other workers much harder to achieve. This has been a problem throughout the strike. The latest moves will make it even tougher. Opponents of solidarity action will claim that if the miners can't hold their own ranks, why should they depend on others for solidarity?

Secondly, the weakening of the strike in this respect allows the TUC leaders much more room to manoeuvre out of giving full support to the NUM. This they are desperate to do. The left union leaders have argued for solidarity but have delivered little since the TUC Congress nearly three months ago. Sections of the right wing led by David Basnett want an update of the Plan for Coal, which presumably would concede some of the issues that the NUM has held out on. Other union leaders want to simply sit on their hands and wait for the strike to end.

Now John Lyons of the electricity supply engineers is urging the TUC to backtrack even on this present low level of support. He will clearly have some allies on the General Council in this move.

As Arthur Scargill has indicated on a number of occasions, if the TUC's support for the miners had approached anything near the level that MacGregor and the coal board have got from the ruling class, then the miners would have won already.

But it also has to be said that the NUM's tactics in terms of the strike have sometimes been lacking. If the union had put more resources into activity, into involving the more passive miners, then they would be in a stronger position today. Management have put these resources in, if the North Derbyshire example is anything to go by. Of course, they have more resources at their disposal, but the area officials have often been reluctant to adopt activity which would involve more people.

And to deny at first, as Scargill did, that there was no drift back to work, can only have caused confusion.

The recent decision of the NUM executive to hold a campaign of meetings in the pit villages and areas seems to be a welcome recognition that this approach must change. If the strike is to be successful it must make involvement of a larger number of strikers a much higher priority. If the issues are explained then it is possible to halt the drift back.

This will depend, however, on two issues which we stressed in last month's *Review* were crucial, and which remain so.

The first and most vital issue as Christmas approaches is that of solidarity. The Tories and coal board are cynically manipulating the special significance of Christmas to miners and their families to try to force them back to work.

This must not be allowed to happen. Financial support and the collection of food and toys are all essential to maintaining the cohesion of the strike. Every area of the country, every workplace which supports the miners should have collection points for food and toys in the run up to Christmas.

### The coal stocks

The second vital issue is the movement of coal stocks. Tory propaganda has always claimed there is little danger of power cuts this winter because of the level of coal stocks. This is simply not true. Now there are press reports that the government may be prepared to move the stocks as early as December. They will certainly be in trouble if the stocks aren't moved before the end of January.

If the miners are to be successful they will need to organise mass picketing against the movement of coal stocks. This will be difficult, especially after the experience of Orgreave.

It will need preparation, with the same diligence and determination as the coal board have shown in their back-to-work campaign. It means beginning the process of involving more strikers in the dispute right now. It means going out on the knocker to all those miners in the outlying areas, who can become isolated and demoralised.

It means organising delegations and visits to other workers to win support and solidarity. It means paying particular attention to building up links with workers in the

# NOTES

## of the month

power stations.

There have been a few encouraging indications in this direction, at power stations like West Thurrock and Didcot—but only a few. These need to be built on fast.

Otherwise Thatcher can continue to maintain an offensive which doesn't bode well for the future of the strike. ■

### KINNOCK

## Bitterness and betrayal

ANY left wing credentials which Neil Kinnock might once have held have disappeared in the last month. Kinnock has become the symbol of everything that is bad about the Labour Party's attitude to the miners' strike. At the outset he called for a national ballot and then has repeatedly involved Stan Orme in a (compromise) negotiated settlement. He found himself too busy to speak at the major NUM rallies some weeks ago. Throughout the strike he has condemned violence.

In doing so he has incurred the wrath of the left. Kinnock had badly underestimated what the strike means to thousands of Labour activists. They have collected hundreds of thousands of pounds. They have gone on delegations, held children's parties and holidays, and generally given full support to the strike. To them, the picket line violence is started and encouraged by the police, not the strikers. This was clear at the annual Labour conference, where delegates made the links between the strike and their own situation in the inner cities.

Most Labour activists are as desperate as the miners themselves for a victory. This isn't just true of the far left. A broad spectrum of the left of the party are involved in miners support work. They feel that Kinnock has betrayed that work and betrayed the strikers. The bitterness goes very deep. Yet it hasn't influenced their leader to shift his attitude. He remains committed to the strategy he has always followed.

In this he is backed overwhelmingly by the parliamentary party. The recent shadow cabinet elections were very revealing. Firstly

they kicked out the left wingers and those who support the strike — notably Tony Benn and Eric Heffer. Secondly, these were replaced not by middle of the road MPs, but by some right wingers like Denzil Davies.

There was clearly little feeling for compromise among the parliamentary party. And the elections didn't reflect the growth of the left over the last months. What is reflected is two basically different approaches to how the Labour Party should conduct itself in opposition.

On the one hand, the right wing and the Kinnockites believe that they have to establish themselves as a good parliamentary opposition committed to consensus politics, but basically with few distinctive—let alone socialist—policies.

Outside parliament, much of the attitude is different. Constituency activists are faced with the abolition of the GLC and metropolitan councils, the threat of rate capping in a dozen boroughs and the increased hostility of local police chiefs. They know that a purely parliamentary opposition may still be there in three years time, but much else might not be. This explains the emphasis on law-breaking if necessary at this year's Labour Conference. Many activists understand that the opposition to Thatcher has to be at least partly extra-parliamentary.

The division in the party reflects these contradictory positions and explains Kinnock's attitude to the strike. Ironically his approach has done little to help him personally, or the electoral fortunes of the Labour Party as a whole. The Tories have always been able to label Labour as the party which supports strikes, regardless of its actual attitude to them.

So Kinnock's vacillation hasn't stopped him being attacked by the right. At the same time, a very high proportion of traditional Labour supporters back the strike, and have been disgusted by his behaviour. So Kinnock has alienated some of his own support, but hasn't won any new support either.

### The basic problem

This doesn't mean that new activists aren't joining the Labour Party. Many have done during the strike, and will probably continue to do so. This is a reflection not simply of struggle, but of the deeply sectional nature of the struggle.

The people who support the miners in each workplace are a minority. In that situation it is often hard to believe that the majority will ever break from their passivity and change, and easier to place faith in electoral change. This is the basis of Kinnockism. But the activists have joined in spite of Kinnock, not because of him.

Meanwhile the basic problems inside the Labour Party remain. Kinnock may be praying for the end of the strike, but even if it is ended tomorrow, his problems would still be there.

Other strikes may not have the national polarisation and impact, but they will still happen and will still need solidarity from, among others, Labour Party members. More significantly, there may be a number of confrontations over rate capping. The strong possibility is that the divisions and contra-

dictions will increase.

But the fact remains that the Labour Party is based on winning elections. Extra-parliamentary activity can be important and can attract new people, but in the end will be subjected to that electoralism. It is this contradiction which means that even the best activists, however bitter they feel about Kinnock, will be forced to back him as the election draws nearer. ■

### CLASS STRUGGLE

## The shape of things to come

WHATEVER the outcome of the miners' strike it will shape things for a long time to come. One of its key features has been the way the strike both creates and reflects a polarisation inside the working class movement.

On the one hand, a sizeable minority of organised workers identify with the strike. The evidence for this lies in the hundreds of collections, levies and delegations which take place week after week; the hard support among Labour Party and trade union activists at their conferences; and the hundreds of thousands who joined in support for the Days of Action earlier this year.

All in all, far more people are identifying with and showing solidarity with the strike than have done so for any strike for years. They reflect the bitterness at the scale of the ruling class offensive on the unions and the working class. But they are still a minority. That minority has grown, but it hasn't been able to win solidarity action among workforces in most places.

Most workers still accept that the miners should settle for what they can get; that Thatcher can't be beaten, and that they can't and won't deliver solidarity action. This polarisation has the effect of making both sides embedded and, for the minority who want to fight in support of the miners, embittered as well.

This isn't just a feature of the miners' strike. The bitterness felt by a group of Austin Rover engineers led them to attack AUEW leader Ken Cure for selling out the strike. But that was a sign of the weakness of their organisation, of the crumbling of the strike, rather than a sign of strength. They have been unable to carry the majority of their workmates in defiance of Cure's sellout.

This is a pattern which is reflected time after time. It is a pattern which reinforces the sectionalism and divisions of the last few years. It is a reflection both of the weakness of shopfloor organisation, and its other side, a lack of ability to act independently of the trade union bureaucracy.

For revolutionaries, it presents both problems and opportunities. The problems are that although the activists become radicalised and embittered, they may not necessarily draw the lessons about what

needs to be done.

Many of them will still look to the election of left trade union leaders, Labour councils and eventually a Labour government to solve many of the problems facing the working class movement today.

Yet much of the weakness of the movement such as the current lack of solidarity, stems from the erosion and weakening of shopfloor organisation (a process if anything hastened under the 1974-79 Labour government). The story of the Cowley car plant in last month's *Review* demonstrated that. But the rebuilding of shopfloor organisation still remains a low priority for many militants. This is a fundamental weakness of the current political revival.

The opportunities facing us lie in the fact that far more people are involving themselves in activity and campaigns, especially round the miners, but over a number of other issues as well. Some of them are open to socialist politics. Our ideas are less isolated than they have been for some years.

We have to demonstrate that we are both the most active and consistent people in fighting round the issues which are mobilising new people. At the same time, we should point out what the deep problems facing the movement are, and show the steps to rebuilding the workplace organisation and strength, which can begin to overcome them. ■

#### EQUAL PAY

## Out of the ghetto?

EQUAL pay for women has resurfaced after years of silence. Two cases last month made the news. A woman cook at Cammel Laird's Birkenhead shipyard was awarded a £30 a week pay increase, on the grounds that her work was of equal value to that of skilled male workers in the yard.

And at Ford, a regrading battle which inspired the women's movement sixteen years ago and has been trundling on ever since, brought 270 women sewing machinists out on strike, and laid off thousands of other carworkers.

Both cases show the terrible weaknesses of the law itself, the approach of the trade union bureaucracy to fighting for equal pay, and the inability of the law to break women out of the low pay ghetto.

Under the original Equal Pay Act of 1970, the cook would not even have been able to claim. It only made provision for the same or 'like' work to be treated as equal, or for a job evaluation scheme to declare different jobs equal. The law was recently amended—under pressure from the EEC—to include work of equal value as qualifying for equal pay. This is a broader definition and will allow a few more women to claim, but will make little difference to women in low grades, as the Ford women have found out.

They have been denied the right to claim that their work is of 'equal value' to men's. Instead they are fighting against the grading

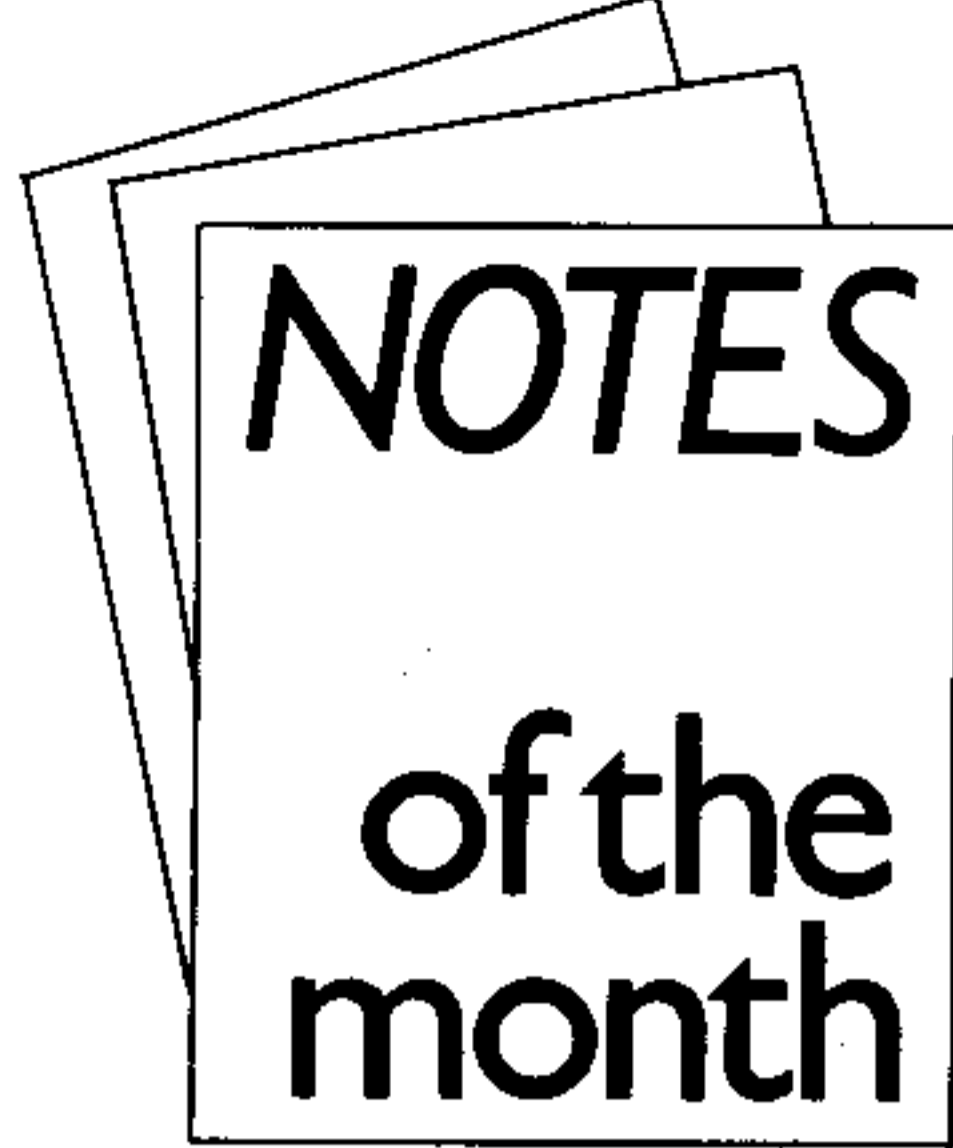
done by a job evaluation scheme which puts them—their job is sewing together fabric for car upholstery—on a lower grade than the men who cut the fabric. The distinction is completely nonsensical and yet another way that grading makes a mockery of equal pay.

None of this is too surprising. The Act itself—introduced by Labour minister Barbara Castle in 1970 and made law five years later—is feeble and full of loopholes. It was never designed to solve the problem that most women are stuck in low paid jobs. Employers were able to use job evaluation schemes (which are neither scientific nor impartial) to ensure this situation continued.

But the way the law has been used by the trade union officials has also been completely bureaucratic. Equal pay strikes—despite a small spate in the mid 70s—have never been adopted as a way to win the claims. Instead, the union officials have used industrial tribunals to fight the claims, with pathetic results. The cook was an exception and her high skills were stressed—no doubt to prevent others from following her example. Working women's earnings as a whole have been barely affected by the Act, and now stand on average at about 70 percent of those of men.

The ineffectiveness of the law is a lesson for those who put their faith in a Labour government or the trade union leaders to change industrial relations. The irony at Cammel Laird is that although one woman has won a higher grade, the future of the whole yard is in danger. When a small group of workers occupied to fight closure, they got no help from union officials who place such faith in the tribunals.

If the Ford women are to win their marathon claim, they will need to reject that course of action. They have to rely on their strike—linked hopefully to the general pay claim at Ford—to at long last win them their struggle for a level of equality. ■



#### IRELAND

## Still talking after all these years

THE recent Northern Ireland summit between Thatcher and Irish premier Garret Fitzgerald has given little comfort to the Irish government. This is despite some fancy statements about 'down to earth solutions', and the rose-tinted glasses that sections of Fleet Street have put on.

The *Guardian* in a typically idiotic editorial summed up the achievement as follows:

'That no decisions were reached was itself welcome news, for had they been they might have been interim and inadequate.'

Fifteen years of war and ten years since the last major British initiative is apparently not enough time for a remedy. But no doubt as

## socialist worker Review

## SUBSCRIBE

**Socialist Worker Review can be ordered from the address below. Cover price is 60 pence (plus 20p postage) and yearly subscription rates are as follows:**

Britain	£8.00	Europe Airmail	£11.00
Overseas Surface	£9.00	Elsewhere Airmail	£14.50
(Institutions add £7.50)			

**Send a year's Socialist Worker Review starting with the issue to:**

**Name** .....

**Address** .....

Return to Socialist Worker Review, PO Box 82, London E2

# NOTES

## of the month

long as there is 'careful consideration' perhaps a solution can be found in the next fifteen.

What is clearly not now a solution is the New Ireland Forum, which Thatcher has rejected outright, despite talk of 'recognising and respecting the identities of both communities'.

The Forum was the latest attempt at a 'solution to the Northern Ireland problem'. The stated aim of the Forum report was to improve British/Irish co-operation on such matters as security, and economics. It also recognised the right of the Irish government to be involved in the running of the North in some way.

Apart from immediate closer co-operation the Forum report put forward

three possible long term solutions to the problem: that Northern Ireland should be jointly ruled by London and Dublin; that Ireland should be ruled on a federal basis; or that there should be a united Ireland ruled from Dublin. Thatcher has now ruled all three solutions out.

These proposals—had they come from London—could well have signified a major break from past British policy. Yet the Forum report was made by a body consisting only of various shades of Nationalist opinion, the three leading Southern parties, and the SDLP in the north.

All of these forces have up to now maintained that only a united Ireland can solve the problems of the North. In their desperation to get 'constitutional politics' back to the fore, and to undercut Sinn Fein, they are prepared to move a long way.

The rejection of the report will do little to help Fitzgerald. This in itself is a problem for Britain who like and trust the fawning Irish premier. So public statements about friendship and co-operation will be made, but they may not be enough.

The early cautious welcome to the report by Jim Prior seems to have been his attempt to keep the Irish side happy, and to give them some credibility.

Fitzgerald desperately needs to rebuild the credibility of the SDLP in the North. Currently abstaining from the discredited Irish Assembly, the moderate Nationalists are in the rather difficult situation of being a reformist party with no parliament to work

through. Their credibility has fallen amongst Catholics, particularly those in the inner city and poorer rural areas. Sinn Fein have eaten away at a large portion of their vote, and despite Republican contempt for Northern parliamentary politics they are serious challengers to the SDLP for the majority of the Catholic vote.

The failure of the Forum will therefore represent a real blow to the SDLP who will be left once again with the choice of staying out of the assembly, or, as so many times in the past, dropping their easily forgotten principles and returning. Either way they risk a lot of damage to their well-worn credibility.

### Crisis in the South

To make things worse for Fitzgerald Sinn Fein are clearly growing in the South, and although their popular vote may be small, it is certainly moving in an upward direction. This is at a time when the Southern state and the Southern economy are looking in a weaker situation than for many years. Unemployment, inflation and emigration are all rising. The government's recent austerity measures have made it few friends, and cracks are beginning to appear elsewhere.

At a time when the crime rate is growing and increased anti-terrorist activity is being carried out, it can be of little help to the Southern government that the credibility of its police force, the Garda, is at an all-time low. Scandals involving cell deaths, false confessions, bribery and corruption have been raging for months, with new scandals turning up all the time.

There is also increasing cynicism about cross-border British/Irish security agreements. These amount to extradition to biased Northern courts, and violent Northern policemen, and extradition to Britain, for what are political offences, and very little being offered in return.

Thatcher and the British clearly want to retain such arrangements and want to make it possible for Fitzgerald to justify doing so. She seems to have nothing to offer in the short term, but what about in the more distant future?

It is possible that in the long term she will try some form of power-sharing initiative. This is what the talk of respecting the wishes of both communities seems to have been hinting at. The last serious attempt to implement power sharing was the ill-fated 'Sunningdale Agreement' of ten years ago.

Sunningdale did little to solve the problems of the Catholics, nor did it prevent the continued armed struggle by the IRA, but ultimately it was brought crashing down by Protestant reaction. Power sharing for them represented a threat to the right of Protestants to rule, and a general strike by the Ulster Workers Council eventually forced the government to abandon the project.

It is possible that ten years on such resistance might not be forthcoming, although it is likely that at least one of the major Unionist parties would oppose this solution. It is also clear that Sinn Fein would have nothing to do with any such venture. Thatcher

**Ideas that can win**  
**Buy Socialist Worker**  
**only 20p**



### SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY OFFER

- 10 issues for £2, including postage
- Normal rates £8 for six months
- £15 for a year

Name .....

Address .....

Money with all orders to: Socialist Worker Circulation, PO Box 82, London E2 9DS  
Cheques/POs payable to Larkham Printers and Publishers. (Write for rates for libraries, institutions and overseas subscriptions.)

though may decide at some stage to take a gamble.

What is clear though, is that she feels under no real pressure to take such a step in the short term. Violence is at an 'acceptable, and containable level', and whilst it may be true that Thatcher cannot inflict military defeat on the IRA it is equally the case that she will not suffer such a defeat at their hands.

For those of us anxious to see the Northern State smashed the fact remains that as long as the struggle against it is a purely military one, as long as no real pressure from the working class of either Southern Ireland or Britain is put on the British ruling class to get out of Ireland the situation will remain one of impasse.

Meanwhile Garret tugs the forelock to Thatcher and the reality of Northern life continues: unemployment stands at 20%; in some Catholic areas it is more than twice that. A sectarian judiciary and police force. The presence of the British Army. All to prop up a reactionary and violent state that can only explain its own existence in terms of that sectarianism and violence. As long as such a society exists then for many in the nationalist areas the IRA will not be seen as the mad bombers Britain paints them, but as freedom fighters, and Sinn Fein as the only major party that recognises the irreformable nature of the state.

Thatcher and Fitzgerald may say nice things about one another and pose happily for the cameras, but this latest contribution to ending the war in Ireland is about as important as Nero's was to putting out the fire in Rome. ■

## STUDENTS

# With friends like this...

'WELL I'm angry, and students are angry. I have given Sir Keith Joseph until tomorrow to meet with us and discuss the Chancellor's proposals. If Keith Joseph wants to see a return to student demonstrations, be it on his head.'

That was the response of Phil Woolas, President of the National Union of Students, to the government's proposals to cut student grants. But will his words and those of his fellow executive members match their deeds?

Students at North London Polytechnic have good reason to believe otherwise.

They have been campaigning against the presence of Patrick Harrington, a National Front organiser who is on a philosophy course at the Poly. It is a campaign which has now lasted almost a year, spilling over from one academic year to the next.

It is also a campaign which has been a tribute to the determination and courage of the students involved. Many have been

arrested, injured by police violence on picket lines and threatened with disciplinary action by the college authorities. At least two face a real possibility of prison for defying a court order and attending the picket lines.

NUS has an official policy of denying a platform to racists and fascists within colleges and student unions. So how have they responded to students putting this policy into practice?

Firstly by making it clear that although they would like to see Harrington out they are not prepared to condone lawbreaking. This is something of a joke given that at every step of the way Harrington has turned to the law courts to back him, and on the whole has been successful in this. The reality is that if you don't break the law, you can't campaign against him.

What is even worse is the way the NUS leadership have abused their position to attack the students involved. In *NUS News*, under the headline 'Fringe Groups Block Student and Staff Anti-Racism Campaign', they try to give the impression that the campaign is the property of a tiny unrepresentative handful of 'fringe' elements. They proudly state that the local executive will have nothing to do with the campaign.

### Resignation demand

In fact each step of the way the campaign has had its tactics endorsed by official student union general meetings involving hundreds. It is true that the local executive dissociated themselves. In fact they refused to carry out democratic decisions on this and other questions.

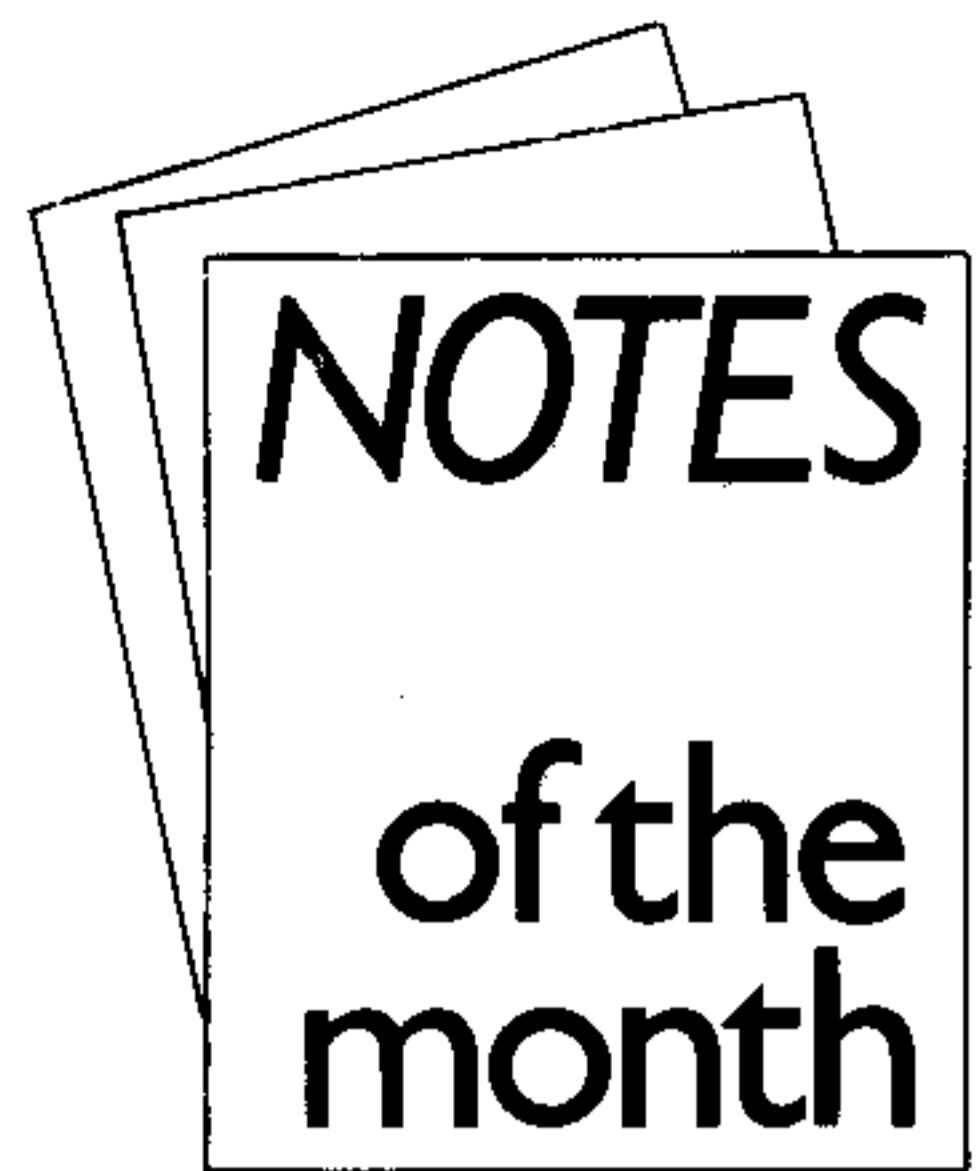
As a result they were forced to resign and have been replaced by a 'caretaker executive' all of whom are involved in the campaign—a fact which *NUS News* forgot to pass on to its readers. They later retracted the statement but not till much damage was done.

Nor is the attack on the students coming exclusively from right wingers. Woolas is a member of the National Organisation of Labour Students and is thought to be on the left within it. The co-signatory of the *NUS News* article, Karen Talbot, is on the far left of Labour, writing occasional articles for such journals as *Socialist Action*. Her behaviour throughout the campaign has been so bad that students from the Poly are demanding her resignation.

Such attacks from the national student body make the winning of the campaign even tougher, and play into the hands of the Poly director, MacDowell, who up to now has been unsuccessful in his attempts to isolate and defeat them.

The students have won victories on the way. On occasions the picket lines have prevented Harrington from gaining entry, and, most notably, he has been removed from the Kentish Town building where the campaign against him was born. Yet if the college authorities thought that was the end of their troubles they were wrong. The normally 'more moderate' students from Marlborough House, where Harrington was moved, have reacted with similar anger, and given the campaign new momentum.

MacDowell, after some early liberal posturing, recently locked all except



Harrington out of the Marlborough building. It is his sworn statements that could eventually get the two students imprisoned.

Meanwhile despite fine anti-racist statements from the ILEA, GLC, and the staff unions, it has been left to the students, and their supporters from other colleges, to bear the brunt of the campaign. It is a campaign that can still be won, but who can blame them if they feel a certain cynicism towards Woolas and Co?

There is something of a gap between the fine words of the NUS leadership against racism, and the more mucky business of putting these words into deeds. One can only hope that for those likely to face a reduction in their grant, a similar gap doesn't exist. However it seems certain that if Keith Joseph is going to see demonstrations return, an awful lot is going to depend on the ability of rank and file activists to organise independently of their leadership. ■



## WORK PLACE NOTES

John Dieson looks at some of the problems of operating as a socialist shop steward.

THERE is always a daily battle to limit and restrict management control. The principle of using collective strength to impinge, daily, on management's apparently god given right to manage remains. That task is still best done through sectionally based stewards' organisation. Well intentioned fulltime convenors cannot substitute themselves for such a base, and even less can fulltime officials who are completely outside the workplace.

There are many different forms of shop steward organisation and it is beyond the scope of this particular article to describe the many specific differences. However it is possible to outline a few guidelines on how to be a good shop steward.

### Election of shop stewards

In many instances shop stewards are elected unopposed. We should not shrink from taking the job on. It is no use being the great arguer in the workplace without the preparedness to go out front, and take on the job.

However even if unopposed it is an important principle to seek a vote of confidence from the members you are to represent. And whenever possible that vote should be taken at a sectional meeting in working hours on the job.

Asserting the right to hold workplace meetings can often start with this simple call for a vote of confidence. Where this is not possible then go for second best—a short meeting in the tea break or dinner break for example.

This apparent formality is particularly important in those unions where stewards, departmental reps or whatever, are not elected on the section but at the union branch. We need to define our workplace, sectional constituency. Officially we might be elected at the poorly attended branch meeting, but that should not stop us unofficially calling the sectional meeting to confirm the branch decision. It not only helps win the members round a collective appreciation of 'their' steward, it can also prove very useful later for combatting branch cretinism. For example when a branch executive tries to impose 'committee discipline' over secret negotiations it is crucial that we assert that we are accountable to the members, and not to the branch committee.

### Issues to take up

No grievance should be considered too small to deal with. Often a steward's credibility is not built overnight by big dramatic issues. It is more often a lengthy process of

being seen to care and take up every member's grievance.

Politically we need to encourage a 'them and us' attitude to management. *They* cause the problem—unfair distribution of overtime, dirty toilets, no sensitivity to individual domestic problems, bullying supervision, canteen prices, favouritism, victimisation, unsafe working practices, heavy workloads, line speeds—the list is endless. *We* must do something about it.

As soon as an apparently individual problem is taken up by a steward the issue must be collectivised. If the management don't budge it is no longer just an individual they are arguing with but all of us.

Obviously many smaller grievances can be sorted out without resorting to action, but they are only resolved to the extent that the management are worried about such action.

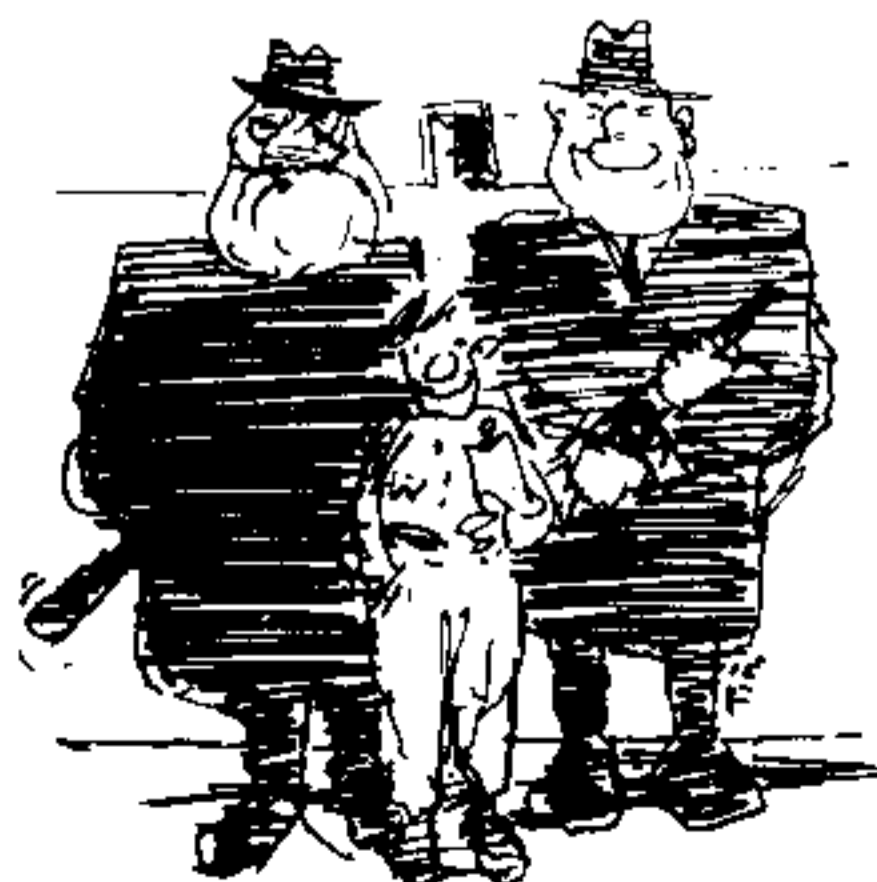
Beware of bluffing management with threats of action—at some time the threat will have to be carried out. Shallow threats don't just show up the individual steward, more seriously, they can give management confidence to go further onto the offensive.

If management do not give in on a particular issue, and the membership are clearly not prepared to fight, then be honest with the membership and explain that the case will not be won until there is more preparedness to fight. It is sometimes possible to bluff gullible managers, but we should never kid along our workmates.

This caution is particularly important to new stewards—care is often needed over assessing what issue to fight on first. As a socialist you might be most concerned about the excessive overtime being worked. But if on the other hand your workmates are much more steamed up over favouritism and discrimination over job allocations, then that's what we must fight on. Early skirmishes pave the way for bigger battles later.

### Negotiations

Never enter into negotiations alone. Always keep your own notebook and record the negotiations accurately. Keep the negotiations short and direct, to the point. Managers like nothing better than cosy chats over cups of tea—it is a common ploy to draw stewards away from their members (as too is apparent management generosity in giving stewards and reps unlimited facility time).



*'Never enter negotiations alone ...'*

Often the most common complaint that workers have of their stewards is that they are always off the job, always in the foreman's office.

Some stewards probably spend more of their working hours talking to members of management than their own members—the same stewards are then the first to blame the 'apathy' of their own members should they not respond over a particular issue.

Leadership in the workplace requires patience—hours of patient arguing. Make sure the hours are spent with the members and not on numerous committees, meetings and the like. This is possibly the single biggest factor in isolating stewards from their members. In one car factory it used to be noted that there seemed to be only two differences between the steward and the foreman. One was that the foreman wore a white coat while the steward didn't. The second was that unlike the steward, you could always find the foreman!

Too much time off the job also enables management to stir it against the steward. It is extremely common for foremen, supervisors, office managers or whatever to go round chatting to individuals while the steward is away. The seemingly innocent chat about problems at home, last Saturday's football, 'and incidentally is Bill (the steward) off *again*, at *another* meeting?' is dangerously undermining of a steward's credibility.

Our job is to be with the members, part of the rank and file; not a well intentioned trouble shooter who's never there.

On negotiations themselves there is one simple rule of thumb. In everything you say imagine the members can hear every word. For us the main purpose of negotiations is to either extract a concession from management or to extract statements from them that expose their real function, or both.

The best so called shit stirring is to simply report back to the members the manager's exact words—hence the need for the notebook, the witness, and the report back meeting.

### Reporting back—sectional meetings

It often takes time and a number of battles to establish the right to openly call shop meetings in working hours. In the course of establishing this 'custom and practice' there are a number of intermediary steps we can take.

Even if your particular section does not yet have the confidence to stop the job for a meeting the steward must still ensure there are full verbal report backs about negotiations, meetings, official union news from the branch and so on. Pinning up notices, and distributing branch newsletters can help, but only marginally. Where organisation is still in its infancy we must temporarily settle for going the round and reporting back individually to every member. This can be done informally on the job and more collectively in tea and meal breaks.

But the first opportunity that arises to establish the precedent of calling a meeting in working hours should be taken. That precedent will be determined by how annoyed the members will be over a



particular issue. It is impossible to determine this in advance. The first few such meetings called must be over issues that guarantee that a clear majority of the members are prepared to defy management and attend.

Strikes often start over management refusal to allow a meeting of members during working hours. In all dealings with management we must keep hammering away about our need to report back to the members, not in order to convince management—but in order to convince the members.

### Wage claims

Most wage bargaining is now national or plant wide and although not under sectional steward control we still need to relate it to the section. If your members only hear about the national wage claim through the press then it's the steward that is at fault for not having reported back from branch meetings, or for not having brought to members' attention a particular official circular or whatever.

No doubt the majority of members will not attend union branch meetings. However the steward can still involve people by discussing resolutions on the section before they are raised in the branch, and above all by reporting back. There is nothing worse than the steward that attends every branch meeting, but never reports back, preferring to simply moan and moralise about the members' apathy. Our job is to lead, not to moralise. It's down to us to *encourage* more participation. After all most members do not attend because the meetings are boring and seemingly irrelevant—and they are perfectly understandable reasons.

### Overtime

Many workers manage to improve their wages well above national rates by overtime working and grade jumping.

Socialists are correctly wary of overtime working—in principle we would prefer a better basic wage and a shorter working week. However if the union nationally is not delivering the necessary wage increase don't be surprised if workers grab the overtime in order to make ends meet. Blanket condemnations of overtime working do not help—it only serves to isolate the political activist from his or her workmates.

We must constantly argue for the need to fight for a better basic wage and a shorter working week—and where that can be won we should also be seeking to keep up a constant pressure for employing more people. But the reality is that even in the best organised sections much overtime is booked.

Where it is not possible to eliminate overtime working the key is to win trade union control of it. Steward supervision of rosters for overtime cuts out management use of overtime allocation to show favouritism and create divisions.

Much overtime is booked, but not worked. If this practice is only done as a 'fiddle' with lower management turning a blind eye then it can always backfire. On the other hand unworked overtime that is evenly and fairly distributed and under constant check by the shop steward is a local 'hidden' wage increase. It's not perfect, but then



... HEALTH AND SAFETY CAN BE THE BREAD AND BUTTER OF A STEWARDS CREDIBILITY...

neither is the wages system itself!

It is better to be involved and winning some sort of trade union control, than to just be hectoring from the sidelines while management totally controls and uses the fiddles and the perks, for their own purposes. If we control we can claim 'custom and practice' to defend individuals, even whole sections, that can be threatened with disciplinary action.

If we are the stewards who are seen and trusted by the rank and file to have always tried to ensure fairness over overtime allocation then our credibility is that much better for the arguments that might come later. Winning support for a national or plant wide overtime ban in pursuance of a national claim, for example, will then be seen as a genuine argument for a sanction against management and not a back door manoeuvre.

### Health and Safety

Defence of conditions and manning levels comes down to the sectional control already described. Health and safety at work warrants more space than this article can cover. The main thing is not to be drawn through Health and Safety legislation into separate Health and Safety Committees which can cut across shop steward organisation. The best Health and Safety Committee is a strong

shop stewards committee that constantly pressurises management over safe working conditions. Expertise of course helps, but without the clout of strong steward organisation too many bipartisan Health and Safety Committees become moralising talking shops.

The daily struggle for safe, clean, more pleasant working conditions can become the bread and butter of a stewards' credibility. Sometimes there are particular jobs with worse conditions than others. If it is not possible to improve these jobs then the steward should devise rosters. Where it is not possible to roster then use a seniority list for members to take their fair turn. Again the key is to wrest control from management.

### Solidarity

Strong shop steward organisation is based on sectional organisation and strength. It does not necessarily, however, have to be dominated by narrow sectional ideas. When the Fleet Street electricians defied the courts and struck in support of the hospital workers they demonstrated considerable sectional strength—they shut down Fleet Street(!)—but they were motivated by solidarity for others.

Principled trade union practices of not crossing picket lines, blacking and so on should never be assumed. They have to be argued for well in advance of being put to the test.

Perhaps the single most important activity is the regular collection of money for other strikes. The money collected is important for the strike, but is doubly important for the givers. The section that today levies for the miners is more likely to honour a picket line in the future. If a collection for a certain strike provokes arguments well and good—it gives us the opportunity to better explain our politics rooted in the concept of class wide solidarity.

In the present climate sympathy action beyond strike collections often requires some official lead. But even when such 'leads' are given, such as Len Murray's call for a Day of Action over Cheltenham GCHQ, they are invariably half hearted. The action will only materialise if the stewards on the ground have the confidence to carry the argument with their members. ■



# What do we mean by..?

## Exploitation

LET'S START with a rough and ready definition. Exploitation is the means by which one class takes the products and/or work of another class.

Such a definition is useful because it emphasises the centrality of production and class, the very core of the Marxist view of social and historical change. The definition is, however, too general. We need to know the specific form of exploitation and the specific nature of the classes in the society being discussed. Only then can we draw practical conclusions about political action necessary to end exploitation.

Consider English feudal society. The serfs, and later the peasants, had the right to use the land for self-sufficiency farming. But a portion of their produce or a money rent was taken by the landed aristocracy and the priesthood. Frequently unpaid work for the local lord could be demanded. Order was kept by armed might and deeply traditional philosophies and religions. There could be no question but that a portion of the produce and work of the serfs and peasants was directly expropriated to provide for the ruling class.

The problem with capitalist exploitation is that compared with this feudal expropriation, it is hidden. Workers have no duty to provide 'free' work to their employers—wages are paid for work undertaken and thus the products of labour are not directly taken by employers. Most importantly, from a capitalist point of view, labour power—the ability to work—is bought and sold in the free market. A bargain is struck between worker and capitalist. The worker sells his or her ability to work for a given period and in return receives a money wage.

### Selling labour power

It is, or at least could be, a system of fair exchange. The worker is, so far, no more exploited than the seller of raw material or capital equipment. Taking this view—of capitalism as essentially just a system of exchange, of buying and selling—the system is indeed one of freedom and equality.

It is however a superficial view of the system. It ignores the importance of how production is carried out and what class relationships emerge at work. Indeed the 'exchange' analysis as outlined above doesn't even mention work. It just describes an agreement for exchange of two goods—labour power and money. There is something special however about the goods—labour power—that has been sold.

For workers have agreed to put their work potential at the disposal of the capitalist. It is for him to decide what the workers make, how they make it, how fast they work, or what machines they will use. It is control over the worker at the workplace that the capitalist has bought. There is now a major difference between capitalist and worker. No longer are they both free, equal and propertied individuals simply buying and selling each others goods. Rather, as Marx puts it,

'He, who before was the money owner strides in front as capitalist; the possessor of labour power follows as his labourer. The one with an air of importance, smirking, intent on business; the other, timid and holding back, like one who is bringing his own hide to market and has nothing to expect but a hiding.'

It is this power and control that enables exploitation to take place. It enables employers to ensure that workers produce a surplus over and above the goods necessary to pay wages. It enables—in other words—the profit, interest and rent upon which the capitalist class lives to be produced.

But this power, which the capitalist has, needs to be enforced. Without a hierarchical structure to run production and discipline

workers within the firm, and a system of law and order and market ideologies outside, there would be no reason for worker to continue production once they had made enough goods to cover their wage costs. Why contribute to the well being of the already wealthy bosses? But hierarchy and imposed discipline, backed up by outside forces, do exist in every workplace.

Thus it is possible to insist that workers produce more goods than necessary to cover wage costs. These extra goods, when sold, provide all property based income. One way of thinking about this is to imagine the working day of an average worker split into two parts—the first few hours making goods whose proceeds cover wage costs—the remaining hours making goods whose proceeds provide profit for the firm.

The first part of the working day Marx defined as equal to the 'value of labour power'. This is determined by a whole series of factors, many operating through the labour market, but in the long run based on the need for continual reproduction of the workforce, physically and in terms of technical and 'moral' skills.

As the requirements of capitalism change and as workers defend their own interests, the dimensions of that need changes. So the value of labour power cannot remain fixed



for the entire capitalist epoch. But while capitalists retain power, the value of labour power will never extend over the whole working day.

The second part of the working day is equal to 'surplus value'. This is eventually divided up and distributed to different sections of the capitalist class. Interest goes to financiers, banks and 'small investors'; rent to landlords; profit to owners of firms and entrepreneurs.

This distribution is by no means a simple matter—Marx wrote a whole volume on it and did no more than point in the right direction. But the distribution must follow the creation of surplus value, so must be a secondary matter to exploitation itself. Indeed virtually all facets of the production process—the nature of the product and technology, must be subordinate to exploitation.

### Monetarist freedom

It is thus after market exchange between capitalist and worker, after the agreement of a 'fair price' for labour power, that exploitation takes place. The freedom to buy and sell labour power marks the existence of capitalist exploitation. This causes numerous commentators to refuse to consider the real hierarchical, dictatorial relations of production.

This refusal is most obvious in the doctrine of monetarism. Here the freedom to buy and sell, to wheel and deal, is the dominating ideology. Indeed this freedom is elevated to spiritual levels by FA Hayek, one of Margaret Thatcher's major economic heroes, who insists that all other social values including democracy, must be subordinate to it. Indeed, if necessary, these other values should be suppressed to maintain this 'freedom'.

Despite the refusal to analyse the labour process directly (that is the job of individual firms and their management) the high level ideologues of capitalism can still produce dangerous attacks on workers. If for instance trades unions organise effectively within a firm, this can be condemned as breach of contract between 'master and man' and thus a direct attack on 'freedom' as defined by Hayek and friends.

Concentration on 'exchange' then helps build a web of ideas, institutions and state violence which form the background for exploitation at work. But it is the management of firms who must actually do the exploiting. It is they who must seek, on a day to day basis, to increase surplus value.

A straightforward attempt to reduce wages would be an obvious stratagem. This could mean actually reducing money wages (the actual number of £1 notes in the pay packet without regard to how much these can buy) or letting money wages increase less fast than inflation (so the real purchasing power or 'real wage' falls).

But important though this stratagem may be at the moment, it is crude and directly confrontational. Furthermore, there are limits to how far wages can be pushed down without serious damage to future 'supplies of labour' and thus future exploitation.

Historically the most important factor

tending to increase exploitation has been the continuous introduction of productivity enhancing machinery. Increasing productivity means increasing each worker's output per hour. Extra profits are squeezed out here in a number of different ways—most directly by making goods bought by wages cheaper. Provided the worker continues to consume the same goods in the same quantity as previously, the store of national product going to the capitalist (profits, rent etc) must increase.

But many other tactics using new machinery are ranged against workers. The use of steam powered threshing machines in the early nineteenth century meant that farmers could and did blackmail agricultural labourers into accepting lower wages by the threat or reality of unemployment.

This is, of course, a commonplace threat to workers nowadays—witness Nigel Lawson's expectation that technological unemployment should push down real wages in the 'low tech' service sector of the economy (provided that he reduces unemployment benefits to force people into such low paid jobs).

Just as important for the capitalist is the increased control over the workforce that many types of new machinery introduce. Frequently even the introduction of new machinery with few direct facilities for increased management control means a reorganisation of production to enforce

greater standardisation of work practices and greater discipline.

The enforcement of managerial control by new technology has been important, but never more so than at present. An obvious example is the introduction of word processors. These can monitor their operators for workrate and accuracy and pass the information quickly to the boss. And the more control the management have, the greater the chance of intensified exploitation.

Throughout their history workers have often resisted the introduction of new machinery, and this analysis has shown why. Such struggles are difficult, but often result in taking back some of the new surplus value extracted from workers. Fightbacks against extra control—through technology or against technological unemployment swelling the 'reserve army of labour'—are also difficult but they are important for they challenge the very source of capitalist vitality, the control over the workplace conditions needed to secure profits.

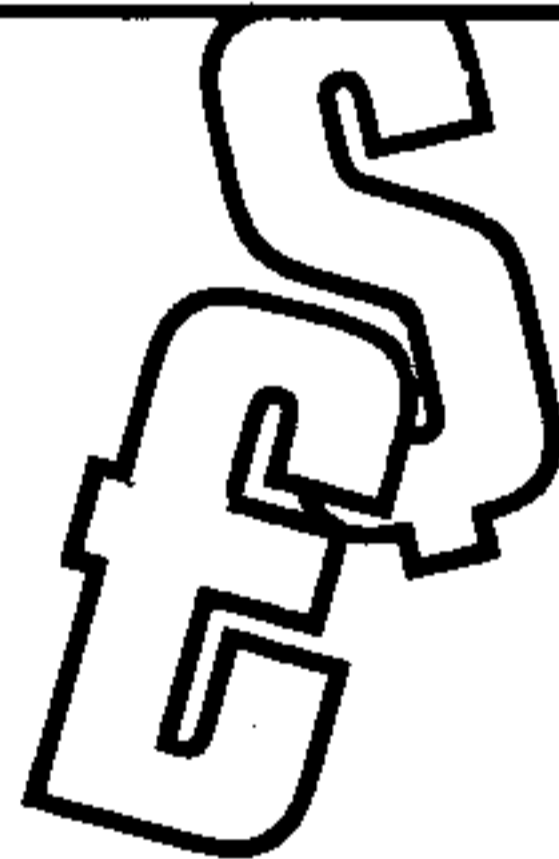
The Marxist notion of exploitation is one of the crucial concepts of socialist politics because it exposes the rotten heart of capitalism in general, whether its form be 'fair' exchange or 'unfair', large scale or small scale, national or international. Without the notion socialist politics rapidly becomes superficial and ineffective. ■

Dave Fysh

# Explaining the Crisis

A Marxist re-appraisal  
by *Socialist Worker*  
editor Chris Harman

£3.95 from your local Socialist Worker bookstall or (post free)  
265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DE



# Women's liberation —two traditions

Class struggle and women's liberation—1640 to the present day  
Tony Cliff

Special offer from *Bookmarks*, 265  
the *Bookmarx club* Seven Sisters Road,  
£4.50 post free from London N4 2DE

CLASS STRUGGLE &  
WOMEN'S LIBERATION  
1640 to the present day



# Splitting the left

WHY did the CPSA Broad Left—the largest and best organised of the union Broad Lefts—split at its recent conference?

In part the answer can be provided by the contradictory nature of the organisation itself. On the one hand it sought to be a successful election machine, looking to tens of thousands of union members to vote for it, on the other its real base lay in a much smaller layer of activists in the union machine.

This support provided the CPSA with a backbone, but in return for electing left officials the activists expect left policies to be put forward by the official union machinery, and official support for disputes in their own areas.

The left officials were therefore torn in two directions. On the one hand there was the pull of the activists, who campaign for them to be elected and re-elected. On the other there was the pull of the mass of the membership who much of the time are quite conservative. In the last few years a low level of struggle punctuated by isolated but bitter disputes has intensified the contradiction.

It is this contradiction that led to last month's split. The split is not between those who are for or against electoralism. Rather the argument is between those who have moved very much to the right, and are trying to avoid any accountability, and those who

believe that maintaining a base among the activists is essential for continued electoral success and therefore have certain constraints restraining any rightward move.

Two events this year have brought the division into the open.

The first concerned an attempt to no-confidence Alistair Graham for his behaviour during the Longbenton dispute. Graham had thrown down the gauntlet to the left. He effectively said, you can censure me as much as you want, no-confidence me and I resign, and we will fight it out amongst the membership.

## The Broad Left caucus

That was the main point of debate at the Broad Left caucus meeting. Ray Alderson (now union Vice-President) for the Communist Party and Jonathan Baume and Mike Duggan for the Broad Left's 'Labour Group' argued against no-confidencing Graham. It was, they said, not the right time and if Graham won we would be stuck with him for another five years.

Militant supporters and others replied that Graham was unpopular as a result of the GCHQ no-strike offer and that we might not get a better chance in a hurry. Significantly one argument that was not raised in favour of pressing the censure motions was that an

election campaign would give a good opportunity for organisation and discussion round the issue of who runs the union.

The vote in the Broad Left caucus meeting went in favour of censuring Graham. But Alderson and his allies refused to abide by it, took their position onto the conference floor and stopped the censure. A chance to get rid of the appalling Alistair Graham had been lost.

The second important division within the Broad Left occurred after five months of the strike at the DHSS computer centres in Newcastle and Washington. It was proposed to escalate the dispute to the Unemployment Benefit Computers at Reading and Livingston. The escalation would have been crucial to winning the dispute and yes votes for action were secured at both Reading and Livingston.

Then the manoeuvring started. As a price for agreement, the Department of Employment section, led by Jonathan Baume, demanded that their members in the unemployment offices be consulted to see whether they would support the action. It was merely a delaying tactic. No serious campaign was undertaken for the blacking of handwritten giro's, and so the proposed escalation could be presented as ineffective. Eight weeks later, with no action having been taken, the executive voted to call off the escalation.

The line up was becoming familiar. Eight Broad Left members of the executive, led by Militant, voted for escalation. Eleven including the Communist Party and the Labour Group, voted with the right against.

The fact that the Newcastle and



Graham unpopular over his handling of the GCHQ dispute but let off the hook...

Washington strikers have still stuck out on their own is a tribute to *their* determination, not that of the national leadership.

The stage was now set for the split at the November annual Broad Left conference. There was some initial attempt to patch things up by conference chairman, leading *Militant* supporter Kevin Roddy. He announced the withdrawal of several *Militant* supporters as candidates for union positions or for posts in the Broad Left. Unfortunately it was a non-starter. That morning's papers had already announced the split.

After Roddy's opening, all tendencies in the Broad Lefts were invited to provide a speaker. Steve Cardownie, for the Labour Group and Ray Alderson for the Communist Party both denounced *Militant* for 'intolerance'. At the end of Alderson's speech, he led a walkout of about 100 delegates to a founding meeting of 'Broad Left 84' leaving about 350 remaining in the hall.

It would appear that Baume and Alderson badly misjudged the situation. They presumably thought they could pull the majority of activists with them, leaving the not overly popular *Militant* isolated. This break from a sizeable section of activists is likely to pull Baume, Alderson and their followers even further to the right.

### Graham's Offensive

The real beneficiaries from the split can only be Graham and the right. There is every reason to suppose that Graham will now go on the offensive against a divided left to strengthen his own position.

He has after all had considerable problems from the left including their successful attempt to prevent him taking his place on the general council of the TUC. The first target of that offensive could well be to get the current industrial action in Newcastle and Washington called off.

This makes the behaviour of Baume and Alderson all the worse. It is clear that, for them, their disagreements with much of the rest of the left have now become as serious as their disagreements with one of the most vicious right wings in any union.

All this has come at a time when the Broad Left looked at its strongest. Civil servants have had to bear much of the brunt of the cuts, particularly those in the Department of Employment and DHSS. Many have been drawn into activity and, despite the failings of the Broad Left in power, the deep hatred that many activists feel for Graham/Losinska has allowed a continued growth in the organisation.

It is clearly the case then that the rightist element is responsible for the split which comes as a culmination of a whole number of sell outs. The job of building the Broad Left must continue. But it also needs to be said that the mistakes of the old Broad Left can be every bit as dangerous for today's Broad Left, if capturing the bureaucracy and winning elections are seen as its main function and priority.

Turning the organisation towards activity and involving the rank and file has to be the direction in which socialists should be arguing. ■

Kieran Kelly

# How they got there

THE CPSA Broad Left, which recently split, has been one of the oldest, best organised and, in electoral terms one of the most successful Broad Lefts. This split represents the latest regrouping in what has been a series of changes in the left's format over the last twelve years.

The first formal left organisation was set up in 1972. It was established against a background of marked change in the nature of white collar trade unionism. Membership had increased dramatically from the end of the war. By 1977, there were 44 white collar trade unions with 3.3 million members.

Unions like the NUT, NALGO and CPSA were recruiting a new layer of members some of whom had been radicalised by the student movement and anti-Vietnam war campaigns. This coincided with attempts by the Labour Government to restrict the wages of white collar workers with the use of incomes policies between 1965 and 1969.

Until the early 1970s, the union's regulations meant that the left had to organise secretly. Their only activity was to circulate a list of names of people to be voted onto the National Executive Committee (NEC). The increasingly younger, more radical nature of the membership gave rise to a movement that wanted to see an open, campaigning, highly political left in the union. So, in 1972, about a dozen people got together at the CPSA Conference and set up an organisation called Redder Tape. Although Redder Tape later became a rank and file organisation involving SWP members, at this stage there was only one IS (forerunner of SWP) member involved. The rest were in the Labour Party, Communist Party or unaffiliated.

The aims of Redder Tape were to unite militants around a common strategy of increasing democracy and rank and file participation in the union. Its first demands included the election of all full time officers, a 35 hour week, no productivity deals and an end to pay determination by comparison.

In 1973, the increasing influence of the left forced the right wing NEC to call a one day strike followed by selective action against Stage II of Tory Prime Minister Heath's incomes policy. It was the first time national industrial action had been taken by civil servants.

In 1974, the left captured control of the NEC, winning 16 out of 26 places. The Communist Party had already pulled out of Redder Tape, partly because of its strategy of organising among civil servants in other trade unions, but mainly because it had seen the opportunities for electoral success. The strategy adopted by the IS membership in Redder Tape and other revolutionaries was one of trying to build in

the offices and branches, believing that the real gains would be made through militant struggles rather than imposing changes from a position of leadership.

At about this time, the *Militant* Tendency began to appear as an organised force in the union.

When the Broad Left was established in 1977, *Militant* became the leading faction within it, eclipsing the Communist Party whose popularity was waning. Redder Tape was still able to work with the BL on many issues despite overall disagreement on strategy. In 1978, the two groups set up the Campaign for Union Democracy which successfully replaced the block voting system with the individual ballot. The left was also successful in winning the election of full-time officers.

### The Broad Left's leadership

Despite some success on the ground, the Broad Left's record in leadership has not been good. In the late 1970s, and early 80s, the mood in the civil service was one of retreat as it was in the rest of the class. The Tories had earmarked it for an attack on trade union organisation—they disbanded the mechanism for determining pay, launched an attack on union facility time and cut over 100,000 jobs in a few years.

Both the pay campaigns of 1979 and 1981 were defensive struggles, relying entirely on piecemeal selective action and the potential for mass involvement was never realised. The BL and the right wing took turns to control the executive and their behaviour was not strikingly different. Both pay strikes took place under right wing leadership and when the left were in control their deep pessimism prevented them from calling action.

Although today much of the antagonism between *Militant* and other sections of the Broad Left takes the form of a right/left split, over Longbenton, this was not always the case.

In 1982, for instance, when DHSS offices in Oxford and Birmingham took strike action against chronic overcrowding and under-staffing, *Militant* members on the National Executive were at least as determined as other left NEC members that the strike should not spread to other offices. They felt that if it spread, the dispute would be taken out of their control by local activists, or that support for national action would be so weak as to damage their credibility.

This was clearly demonstrated when, during a day of action in support of the strike, Kevin Roddy, leader of *Militant* inside the CPSA asked for Longbenton, their traditional base, to be excluded from the strike. ■

Sally Bild

# Hungry for profits

FAMINE is nothing new. Throughout history people have died of hunger. And that hunger has always been the result of the greed of the rich and powerful rather than the supposed lethargy of those who suffer.

Before the 16th century, however, there was no such thing as 'third world' poverty. Death from starvation was as widespread in Europe as it was in Africa, Asia and America. In fact, the empires that once spanned the poverty stricken continents of today were, if anything, more abundant than Europe at the time.

Europeans travelling to these empires marvelled at their richness, including those who visited the once powerful civilisation that is now Ethiopia—home of the fabulously rich Queen of Sheba. One Scottish nobleman, travelling in the 1770s, reported an Ethiopian court of great power and pomp, and a monarch whose infantry numbered 30,000 and whose cavalry wore coats of mail.

All this changed with the beginnings of capitalism in Europe. From the 15th century onwards Europeans began four centuries of systematic plundering. First Latin America, then the West Indies, Africa, India and China.

These continents didn't just become gold and silver mines for Europeans. As capitalism became more entrenched, they came armed with elaborate taxes and trading agreements that ruined indigenous manufacturing, leaving once relatively prosperous nations totally dependent on British exports.

## The colonial experience.

The classic example of this decimation of international competition in manufactured goods was that of India, where one governor general of the East India Company re-

marked in 1835 that 'the bones of the weavers are bleaching the plains of India.'

And, of course, the other source of profits was slavery. Over a period of two centuries Africa became, to use Marx's words 'a warren for the hunting of black skins.' Estimates as to the number who actually arrived in America alive range from 10 to 100 million, with up to 20 percent dying on the way.

Obviously the Africans who the slave hunters grabbed were the fittest and youngest, ripping the heart out of the productive base and capacity of the continent.

The ending of colonial rule didn't bring independence to the plundered and decimated countries of the world. The West ensured their continuing dependence through a whole barrage of economic and political ties—increasing the control the West has over the destinies of hundreds of millions of people.

The most obvious method of control is that of loans. The countries of sub-Saharan Africa, where famine is now killing thousands daily, owe around \$48 billion to people who do nothing but lend. For Ethiopia, for example, this means coughing up \$89.3 million this year alone, of which \$25.4 million is just to pay off the interest owing.

Such repayments would be crippling for even wealthy countries. For Ethiopia, with an average per capita income of \$130, for Mali at \$154, for upper Volta at \$133 and for Chad, even lower at \$107, they mean economies which can never provide even the most rudimentary means of survival for whole sections of their populations.

In order to pay off these loans countries are obliged to devote much of their productive capacity to the extraction of raw materials, or the growing of cash crops, for trade with the West. As a result the con-

sumption needs of the population are necessarily neglected.

As one Brazilian commentator remarked, 'The enormous strip of *massape* in the Brazilian North-east is one of the most fertile areas in the world. It is nine times larger than the cultivatable land of Japan which feeds 100 million people. But from our land we get only sugar cane and some subsistence products in quantities well below the needs of the 23 million inhabitants of the region.'

One of the main causes of the Ethiopian famine of 1973 was the cultivation for cash crops of the once traditional grazing lands of semi-nomadic tribes. With nowhere to fatten their herds, when drought hit they were decimated, and the ensuing famine wiped out well over 100,000 people.

These countries, who must export agricultural products and raw materials to survive, also suffer transport systems which cut off any possibility of developing internal markets. All roads and railways point to the ports rather than across regions.

But an even greater consequence is that the world prices of these products are subject to much greater fluctuations than those of manufactured goods. In the late fifties cocoa prices went from \$1000/ton one year to \$400 the next, then back to \$1000, and then down to less than \$600.

The countries who relied on cocoa earnings for much of their income were totally unable to make any viable plans as to development for years. Furthermore, the effect of a large scale drop in prices can be catastrophic.

## Trade agreements

A good example is that of Zambia, a country reliant on copper for 97 percent of its foreign earnings. As a result of the price of copper dropping by almost 70 percent in the space of nine months in 1974, the country was having to survive on 55 percent of its original imports in 1975.

Within these price fluctuations the overall trend is, of course, downwards. In 1975 a given quantity of exports from these poverty stricken countries bought 21 percent fewer imports than they did in 1955.

This drop in earnings isn't just the result of 'market forces'. Coffee producers now receive only 4 percent of the world price. The remaining 96 percent is pocketed by commodity speculators and merchants.

Manufactured goods from the West have also risen in price. Many trade agreements oblige governments to buy equipment from the West at vastly inflated prices. Massey Ferguson and International Harvester can expect to get 25 percent more for their tractors through such agreements than they would otherwise.

With such huge loans and price discrimination to overcome it's understandable that poor countries queue up for aid. Such aid is, however, peanuts. The total amount going to

## INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISM ★ 25

The winter issue of the SWP's quarterly journal

### Articles on

- Jim Larkin, syndicalism and the 1913 Dublin lockout
- Revolution and state capitalism in the third world
- The police
- Women's oppression.

£1.50 from your local *Socialist Worker* bookstall, or (plus 25p post) from IS Journal, PO Box 82, London E2



A CIA report of 1973 proved the American government is keeping the wraps off this particularly nasty weapon. It noted that growing food shortages would mean 'an increase in US power and influence, especially vis-a-vis the food deficit poor countries' and 'in a cooler and therefore hungrier world, the US's near monopoly position as food exporter...could give the US a measure of power it had never had before..'

Despite the grand title of the US's 'food for peace' programmes, they have often been used to fund the military expenditure of many recipient countries.

At the end of the day, food aid programmes have always been a good way of getting rid of massive surpluses—generally of inferior produce. And a less costly one than paying farmers not to grow particular crops.

Every so often our television screens are filled with the horror of hunger. Every so often people are stunned into sending donations, and putting money in collection boxes, in the hope they can, in some way, alleviate such misery.

But no matter how generous we are the situation for the world's starving millions is getting worse every year. As a result of various government policies designed to comply with the strictures of Western loans and aid programmes, 20 percent less food is grown in Africa now than in 1960.

### Destruction of food

Today 20 percent of Africans are suffering from hunger, while half their children are suffering from malnutrition. Nor is Africa alone. India is expected to suffer famine over the next year as a result of crop failure. Every country in Latin America suffers from huge food shortages.

Even in China—the one country where hunger has supposedly been eradicated—children regularly fall asleep in the schools because of the rotten diet.

Meanwhile farmers in the West are paid not to grow particular crops in order to keep prices stable. And the EEC spends a third of the value of its agricultural production on disposing of surpluses. In 1980 British farmers were paid to destroy around 2,000 tonnes of foodstuffs. Even so, food stocks go up.

The common wheat stock of one million tonnes in 1979 had risen to 4.7 million tonnes two years later. Butter stocks increased from a quarter of a million tonnes to 1.2 million, and beef from 254,000 to 5,104,000 over the same period.

And while the suffering worsens, the bankers, the directors and owners of crop marketing companies (over 55 percent of the world's total grain production is controlled by four companies), and fertiliser and farm equipment suppliers get fatter.

Overall the world produces more than enough to feed everyone who inhabits it. What stops the millions who need food from getting it is an economic system that ensures a minority is continuously bloated. And for as long as that situation remains, the donations and the collections can barely dent the problem. ■

Alan Gibson

Latin America in 1977 was less than the price of a nuclear submarine. The British government distributes around 0.35 percent of the countries' gross national product, and is trying to cut it.

But even peanuts don't come free in a capitalist world. Most aid is tied to loans and trading agreements. In 1981 Britain gave the United Nations charity UNICEF \$11.8 million. In 1982 UNICEF ordered \$11.7 million worth of British goods.

Susan George in *How the Other Half Dies* states, 'Any 10 percent increase per capita income in a country receiving food aid is estimated to result in 21 percent more sales for US farm products.'

Technical aid has its benefits—but not for the recipients. The celebrated 'green revolution' of ten years ago was more of a 'revolution' for the bank balances of fertiliser companies than for the millions who had

placed so much hope in it.

Aid also comes with a huge array of political strings designed to ensure that the recipient toes the line and stands up for 'freedom and democracy'. Here it's significant that a number of West European governments and the Americans are now bragging of the greater ties they have made with the strategically important Ethiopian government since the famine there began.

The poorest countries can easily go to the wall if they don't match up to the right standards, while relatively rich countries can receive millions.

A further political development of aid programmes is the realisation that 'food is a weapon'. This was the case as early as the 1920s, when it was used to try and isolate the Bolsheviks. Food was used again to bolster anti-communist forces at the end of the Second World War.

# RATE CAPPING A TORY TIME BOMB

Rate capping is clearly becoming a major point of dispute between local councils and the government. How best can socialists fight back?

Written by Gareth Jenkins with additional information by Pete Ainsley and Ian Wall

## NUMBERS

Local authorities are often the largest local employer. Any action across the boroughs could involve very large numbers of workers.

## RATE CAPPED COUNCILS

LONDON	NUMBER OF WORKERS
Brent	12,629
Camden	7,196
GLC/ILEA	110,607
Greenwich	6,264
Hackney	7,224
Haringey	13,020
Islington	6,042
Lambeth	9,950
Lewisham	7,342
Southwark	N/A

## OUTSIDE LONDON

Basildon	1,336
Leicester	4,080
Merseyside	11,404
Portsmouth	3,125
Sheffield	31,760
South Yorks	5,290
Tameside	N/A

N/A - not available

IT IS difficult to exaggerate the scale and ferocity of the Tories' onslaught on local government spending. Relentlessly, year after year since 1979, they have chopped away at the services provided by town halls—services which up till now most people have taken for granted.

The cuts carried out by the last Labour government were in truth bad enough. But the detailed interference and the system of penalty for 'over-spenders' have marked a qualitative deterioration in local government provision.

Between 1979 and 1984 the government grant to councils (the Rate Support Grant or RSG) has been slashed from 60.8% of expenditure to 48.3% — a staggering cut of £9 billion. On top of that the government has, via the 'block grant' system introduced in 1980, reduced payment to specific authorities which it reckoned were overspending.

Councils have responded in a number of ways. Services have been pruned; 5% of jobs have disappeared, chiefly by voluntary redundancy and non-filling of vacancies; reserves have been run down; capital expenditure has been reduced.

Even Tory councils have been caught by the penalty system, despite their 'prudent' (ie mean) management of resources. They have grumbled but by and large fallen into line behind government policy.

With Labour councils — the real target of Tory fire — the situation has been somewhat different. Struggling with the extra burden thrown on slender resources by the mounting effects of unemployment and urban decay, they have attempted on the whole to preserve essential services.

But they have done so at some cost. Massive rate rises have provided much of the expenditure needed to replace declining funds from central government. The net result has been to pass on the cuts to working class people in a different form.

These rate rises have also been used as a pretext by the government to close the one avenue open to councils to raise revenue independently of government wishes. That is the whole purpose of the rate-capping legislation.

The net effect of the new law is that even where councils *want* to raise rates in order to cover expenditure (and most Labour authorities now recognise that in any case that option has become undesirable) they are no longer in a position to do so. The stark truth — and it is one they recognise — is that *unless they fight* they will find themselves presiding

over a quite unprecedented cutback in services. This they are not prepared to stomach.

The level of social misery that will be inflicted as a consequence can be gauged by what Haringey councillors (North London) calculate will be the effect in their borough of obeying the government: they will have to stop primary school milk, close all nurseries, close old people's homes, increase council house rents, reduce street lighting by 40% and cut jobs by 1500. (*New Statesman*, 12 October 1984).

How does rate-capping work? In essence, all 'hit list' authorities have their spending levels for 1985/6 fixed at the same level as for this year (except Greenwich (London), the Inner London Education Authority and the Greater London Council, which must also have cuts of 1½ per cent).

But because of inflation and commitments already entered into, cuts of at least 5% are required. Where authorities have used 'creative accounting' the cuts will be much larger. Creative accounting involved setting up special funds to get round the penalty system. Hackney (London), for example, reported to the government a spend for this year of £82 million. They actually spent £106 million. Their cut will therefore be proportionately much greater.

The laws allowed one escape route — derogation or redetermination. If they chose, councils could have applied to the government for reconsideration of the limit decided by the government. But this involved handing over to them almost total control of not only next year's budget but following years' as well. No council was prepared to do that, not even Tory Portsmouth.

A glance at the hit-list of rate-capped councils indicates the political nature of the Tories' attack. Of the 18 councils named, seventeen are Labour. A majority are inner city London or northern conurbations. The Tories know they have to break these councils for having refused over a long period of time to fall obediently into line. They can then clean up on the rest (which are also affected by cuts in RSG) by way of widespread cuts and privatisation.

The united response of defiance from the rate-capped Labour councils has been more impressive than anything we have seen before.



Opposition to previous attacks was patchy and limited.

For example in 1981, Ted Knight, leader of Lambeth Council (South London), after much fine talking retreated ignominiously into a policy of cuts in services, agreement to sell council houses and putting up the rates massively.

However, a number of things have changed since 1981. On the one hand, the Tories have pushed Labour councils into a corner. It is no longer a question of giving in, in order to fight another day. Giving in on the Tories' terms now would entail political suicide.

On the other hand, a new breed of councillor has come to the fore. Starting with Ken Livingstone's GLC victory in 1981, the old town hall Labour mafias have been progressively replaced by younger, keener Labour Party activists, most of whom learnt from the non-Labour left the value of extr-parliamentary activity.

Hence the enormous increase in *campaigning* in the localities, with a view to winning support from all groups affected by the cuts. That is not to ignore the limitations in this kind of campaigning — it is very far from the idea of active mobilisation of council employees and consumers *as workers* — but it is a step forward from what existed before.

**T**he net result of all this is that there now exists across a wide range of councils, particularly the hit-list councils, a body of councillors with broadly similar convictions about the need to act together in a determined fashion. This was demonstrated in the recall local government conference held last July to discuss and co-ordinate activity. As *New Socialist* put it (September 1984):

‘... though the wags were predicting that they would emerge with the slogan, “Strength through Diversity” they reached a rare degree of unanimity over the 2½ days. The front line authorities in the big cities agreed a tactic of “non-compliance” against rate-capping and penalties.’

However, within this ‘rare degree of enforced unanimity’ there exists significant debate about what *specific* policies follow from the tactic of non-compliance.

The two main currents to confront the question of legality tell us something about the extent of the councils' determination to push the struggle to the bitter end. They are also overshadowed by the right-wing and Labour leadership refusal to endorse any breaking of the law.

The first (and probably majority) position on the left involves a refusal to set a rate. Ted Knight, writing in *Socialist Action* (28 September 1984), put the case in the following terms:

‘Compensating for Tory cuts would mean increases (in the rates) of 50 per cent plus. That is not politically, socially or

practically acceptable.

‘We are arguing for a return of rate support grant to local authorities. If we could get back the £3½ billion that's been taken away from London, not only could we maintain existing services, but we could extend them *and* reduce the rate burden on the communities we represent.

‘In Lambeth, we are discussing this with user groups and trade unions. Our budget will be set over the next three months as a result of such consultations. It will be supported and defended by trade unionists and the community as well as Labour councillors.

‘From January onwards we are mounting a campaign to demand government resources for that budget. We're saying it's impossible to raise money locally to meet our needs. We'll take our campaign right to the point where the government will legally insist on the council setting a rate.

‘Our argument is that if we set the rate, we can only set it within the government's terms. That means we cannot provide the services we require: the government's got to provide resources directly...

‘Not setting a rate is demonstrating publicly that this council is prepared to comply with Tory legislation, it shows the government and the local people that we cannot continue under the present legislation.’

But there are real weaknesses in this strategy. The chief of these is that it leaves unclear what happens at the end of the day if the government doesn't bend under the pressure of public opinion. To delay the setting of the rate, in the hope that eventually the government will cough up, ducks the question of whether one should be set in the end, reluctantly but on the government's terms.

Delay also fails to make clear at what point people should move into *action* to defeat the Tories. The initiative remains with the council, and therefore with the possibility of a rotten deal being cobbled together.

For that reason, the second position — that of deficit budgeting — is a distinct improvement. The council refuses to move beyond using the actual funds available from the RSG and existing rate income, but is committed to maintaining services. It therefore involves setting an illegal rate.

Whereas the Ted Knight option evades the question of legality, the second cannot do so. The council would be irrevocably committed to fighting the government as a result. In that situation, mobilising active support would become a necessity and the initiative could not remain solely in the hands of the council.

The demand that best fits the deficit budget option is ‘the three no's.’ No cuts in jobs or services no rent increases and no rate increase. Only Hackney council seems to have raised this demand so far.

Writing in *Socialist Organiser* (27 September 1984), Hilda Kean, Labour leader

## LOW PAY

**Many Labour councillors' hostility to Nalgo members in town halls is based on the belief that they are too well paid. Certainly most of the ones that they**

**meet—directors and senior management—are very well paid, but nearly 37 percent earn less than the TUC's 1984 low pay definition.**

**Fifty-one percent earn £118 a week or less, with women concentrated in the lower grades and in part-time work. A third of all women full-time workers earn less than £105 a week, compared with 8 percent of men.**

**NUPE members' earnings are generally so low that even with some local improvements most manual workers fall below—often well below—the low pay limit. 60 percent of manual workers are part-time female workers.**

**In 1984 they worked an average of 18¼ hours for £33.48. Full-time women workers earned £89.28 with an average basic of £72.16; full-time male manual workers earned £119.53, with an average basic of £79.83.**

**In the London rate-capped authorities these figures will be upped by London weighting, but that is paid to compensate for the considerable extra cost of living in the capital. Camden has a minimum earnings guarantee which does boost pay.**

**Nevertheless, none of the Labour councils has significantly improved the pay of its low paid white or blue collar staff above the national pay rates given above. Like most other authorities they pay lousy wages to most of their workforce.**

of Hackney council, in London, spelt out her reasons for supporting deficit budgeting:

'I think we must also recognise that one of the reasons why Liverpool were successful is that they were putting forward a very clear position of a deficit budget — a position that was understood by local people, and one which they were able to mobilise local people on.

'We also have to take on the argument about rates. An option that says that a rate won't be set does imply that rates are the issue. Rates aren't the issue. The issue is cuts.

'That option also means that it is not clear to local people what we are saying. We have to be aware of the reputation of Labour councils. Unfortunately they are not as popular as one would like, and there has been a cynicism about promises made in the past by local councils.

'So you have to have a very clear position that local people can see you are keeping to.

'I think a deficit budget is the preferable option, but the main thing is that we have said clearly that we are going for a policy of confrontation...'

The reference to Liverpool is important, because the experience of Liverpool's fight against the Tories has formed a central part of the debate among the hit list councils and the Labour left generally.

In theory, Liverpool went for the deficit budget option. Their clear and unequivocal stand on no rate rises and no cuts — and with that, the threat of an illegal budget — rightly won them massive support among working class people.

But in practice they slid towards the option of refusing to set a rate. Having generated mass support they postponed setting the rate while they negotiated with Patrick Jenkin, Secretary of State for the Environment.

The deal they eventually got was claimed as a victory. In fact it was considerably less than that. In return for some concessions (most of which they were entitled to), they put up the rates by a massive 17%. The deal with Jenkin also meant something else — it substituted clever negotiations for testing the strength of working class opposition to the Tories' attack on local council spending.

In a sense, Liverpool won through a combination of bluff and clever tactics. They were also helped by the objective situation. The Tories were willing to buy off possible confrontations, so as to be able to concentrate on the one decisive confrontation, with the miners.

What is fascinating is to see how different bits of the Liverpool experience are used by the different options. All agree on the need for activity outside the council chamber. But since Liverpool never moved into illegality, the precise question of whether mobilising workers is central or simply part of the support team was never tried out either.

As Bill Hamilton, writing in *Socialist Action*

(12 October 1984), points out, the softer option of refusing to set a rate 'can appear to be a fight around the council's right to raise the rate — a policy which can be used to hit the local communities. *Sliding over the problem is an attempt to unite those who want to fight the Tories and those who don't.*' (my italics — GJ).

In other words this option is a bridge to the policy of capitulation being preached by the right wing of the Labour Party. What *they* are urging is respectable and limited opposition. In the words of Labour's shadow spokesman for the environment, John Cunningham, councils should 'hang on at all costs until a Labour government is returned at the next general election.'

It is for this reason that we cannot remain neutral as between the options currently being discussed on the Labour left. The deficit budget is the one we must support.

There can be no doubt. If a dozen or more councils were to enter vigorously and unitedly into illegality the anti-Tory struggle would receive a massive boost, with workers being given a lead to take action to defend their interests.

**O**f course, whether workers would move to the centre of the stage would depend on other things, like their state of confidence and organisation. And it is here that a profound problem emerges at the heart of even the best of the Labour council's plans to mobilise against rate-capping. Funnily enough, the problem rests on the question of unity.

The statements of left council leaders constantly emphasise a united campaign. On the face of it there is absolutely nothing wrong with this emphasis. It is a matter of elementary common sense that unless the campaign involves a very large number of councils working in a co-ordinated fashion the Tories will pick off the weaker and more isolated councils and so break opposition to their plans.

So far, so good. It is when the principle of unity is applied to the social forces involved in the campaign that the problem comes to the fore.

The point comes clear when we examine the rash of disputes that have recently erupted in town halls up and down the country.

We have, for instance, the extraordinary spectacle of the leader of St Helen's council, in Lancashire — a council, incidentally, that has given solid backing to the miners — being moved to denounce the town hall union, Nalگو, as 'anti-socialist'.

The reason for this behaviour is not simply that councillors are at the end of the day employers and bound to act as such. It is rather because of the nature of the task they have set themselves — to make councils popular with the users in the community.

With resources starved, there is only one available method to make councils responsive

## DISPUTES

**ALTHOUGH** there are many minor disputes in councils all the time the list below shows some of the more important recent disputes.

**CAMDEN.** Homeless Persons Unit on strike since 14 August 1984 for more pay and jobs.

**HACKNEY.** Libraries closed by manual workers' industrial action for four weeks over wages.

**ISLINGTON.** Nursery workers for several months. Now over.

**LEWISHAM.** Housing 'Wages' section—continuing strike.

**SHEFFIELD.** Housing: 650 on strike for eight weeks over withdrawal of New Technology Agreement.

**ST HELENS.** Whole workforce was on strike over reorganisation. Manual workers returned. Nalگو still on strike after five weeks.

**GLASGOW.** Housing department: all-out strike began end of October.

**BOLTON AND CLWYD.** Nursery workers on strike for several months.

**SOUTH YORKS.** Dispute over pay for bus workers.

to community needs. Councillors have to exploit more intensively the *human* resource (their own employees) under their immediate control. Decentralisation of services, reorganisation and introduction of new technology appear the only way out in the absence of extra funds.

The price is tearing up trade union agreements and pushing employees into industrial action. Councillors then see the failure of their own workforce to go along with the remedies they propose as criminal folly, a shortsighted defence of selfish interests in the face of a much greater and more deadly enemy. It is this kind of logic that makes left-wing councillors hostile to town hall disputes.

All this brings us back to the question of unity. The horrible irony is that far from it being the fault of town hall employees it is the councillors' action in denouncing their employees' struggles which will undermine the basis of a fighting campaign against rate capping. Only if employees are confident about protecting their own immediate interests will they possess the ability to mobilise to defend the councils.

We have therefore to say two things to left Labour councils wishing to take on the Tories. We support you one hundred percent in your defiance, your deficit budgeting and decision to go into illegality. That is precisely the lead that is needed, one that can mobilise the many thousands of trade unionists who look to you, as to the Labour Party, to resist the Tory onslaught.

But we will not support you when you undermine the conditions of your own workforce. For the only way in which the Tory attack can be driven back is on the basis of independent rank and file mobilisation, not just in the town halls but in every workplace in the locality. Indeed, a campaign that fails to build on workers' own interests, not on what they are told are their interests, will not succeed.

**T**he relationship between what goes on in the town halls and the wider world is an important one. When left Labour councillors talk about mobilisation across the entire community they are correct. Nalgo in the town hall is certainly not able to defeat the Tories on its own. But the councillors are wrong in not understanding what the basis of that wider support has to be. Only users of council services *mobilised as workers* can beat the government.

The experience of town hall disputes has an immediate relevance in this context. If councillors, for the best of motives, act in such a way as to weaken trade union organisation in the town hall, they will simultaneously tend to play down an element of independent trade union organisation among the rank and file workers they are attempting to appeal to as users of council services.

And if town hall employees, disillusioned

by their council's antics, fail to take the initiative in spearheading the anti rate-capping campaign, the chances of it spreading (as it must) to other groups of workers less directly affected because their jobs are not on the line, are diminished.

If rank and file trade union organisation is the key then one welcome development is the creation of 'London Bridge'. This is a network of shop stewards across the capital to co-ordinate trade union action against rate-capping. Up until recently, this kind of organisation was totally missing.

'London Bridge' recently called a conference attended by 30 workplace stewards. They voted for the 7 November strike and also voted for all-out action in the hit-list boroughs in the event of redundancies or commissioners being sent in.

Nevertheless the orientation of 'London Bridge' itself is still very much towards council leadership of the anti-rate capping campaign. That means that it wavers between seeing independent workplace organisation as the key and lining up behind whatever seems to be the council's terms of reference — even if that is the softer, Ted Knight option.

The job of revolutionary socialists will be to develop and strengthen this sort of organisation. They will also have to help clarify the need for *independent* organisation, for undoubtedly many of those participating in or looking to such organisation are confused about the role of Labour councils.

To do that, we have to be seen as the most resolute partisans of council defiance and of the need for councils to move into illegality. At the same time, we have to develop confidence in self-activity. Every section of the working class is affected by rate-capping (since we are all consumers of council services). So the initiative for developing the confidence does not just lie with those immediately affected by rate-capping.

We must link the campaign against rate-capping with what people are most immediately aware of, and with the activities that go with it — the miners' strike.

The argument about the miners' defiance of the courts points directly at councils moving into illegality. Questions of what is needed for human satisfaction and the government's definition of what is 'economic' (which is at the heart of the NUM's battle) has an obvious spillover into the question of what Tories define as 'wasteful' council expenditure.

At the same time — and this is the crucial issue — the question of active solidarity with the miners can be a springboard into discussion about how we mobilise to stop services being slashed.

The sooner councils open a second front against the Tories, the sooner the argument for mobilising against an attack that penetrates every corner of workers' lives can be put —and, let us hope, win.

# IRELAND

## THE MISSING KEY

**CHRIS HARMAN**  
reviews a new  
book on Ireland

**Communism is Modern Ireland: the pursuit of the Workers' Republic since 1919**

*Mike Milotte*

*Gill and Macmillan £25 (available through the Bookmarx Club for £8.95)*

**T**HE HISTORY of modern Ireland presents two great contradictions. It was one of the first countries to experience a massive bourgeois nationalist revolt, in 1798, long before countries like Germany or Italy, let alone China and India. Yet while most of these late comers have achieved national unity and independence, Ireland is still split in two. Its six north eastern counties remain as Britain's last major colony, and its political life is very much dominated by the unresolved business of the era of the French revolution.

It was shaken in the first half of the twentieth century by upsurges of working class struggle more powerful and radical than those in the cities of Britain—the great strikes in Belfast in 1907 and 1919, the Dublin lock-out of 1913, the Belfast unemployed agitation of 1932 and the wartime strikes in defence of union rights in that city in 1942 and 1944. Yet the socialist or Labour Parties have been weaker, in both the North and the South, than anywhere else in Europe.

Mike Milotte sees these two contradictions as being intimately connected.

His central contention is that of James Connolly in *Labour in Irish History* and that of Leon Trotsky in his theory of permanent revolution. The local bourgeoisie was too weak and too bound by ties to British capitalism ever to be able to lead the sort of uncompromising struggle needed to bring national unity and independence. The national question could never be fully resolved except by independent working class activity.

Indeed, he sees the general argument about permanent revolution as having special strength in the case of Ireland.

Modern large scale industry was for a very long time virtually confined to the area around Belfast where the overwhelming majority of the workforce were from Protestant backgrounds. There was (and still is) systematic discrimination when it came to getting jobs, particularly skilled jobs. The large engineering and shipbuilding plants of the area always employed about nine Protestants to every one Catholic (in an island where only a quarter of the population were Protestant) and unemployment in the area was

always about twice as high among Catholics as Protestants.

All this made it possible for these workers to be bound to a political machine controlled by Anglo-Irish landed and industrial interests who opposed the national movement. The Protestant workers feared any change which would open them up to the possibility of being ruled by a government which might destroy or even reverse the pattern of discrimination. The result was that the section of the bourgeoisie most adamantly opposed to national independence and unity had a very powerful weapon at its disposal.

It was this binding of Protestant workers to Orangeism that above all enabled the British to establish and maintain the Northern Ireland statelet when they were driven out of the rest of Ireland in 1921.

Once partition had taken place, the dream of the Southern middle class of building a stable modern state was thwarted. The South simply did not have the resources to achieve a sustained independent momentum of industrialisation. Modern industry did not really begin to develop until 40 years after independence—and then it was on the basis of deals with foreign capital, not on the basis of any self-contained national capitalism.

**B**ut it was not only the national movement that was broken by partition. So was the socialist movement. Until the First World War it was possible for socialists to believe that the sectarian divide in the working class of the Belfast area would simply break down in the course of quite low key working class struggles.

After all, this was what happened in many parts of Britain (Lancashire, Merseyside, Glasgow and Edinburgh, the North-East). The working class in these places were divided very much along sectarian lines right up until the first decade of the twentieth century. This was a result of old established, mainly Protestant, workers turning against more recent Irish immigrants.

Yet these divisions were broken down relatively easily in the period before and after World War One by the spread of mass trade unionism on the one hand and the very tame propaganda of the Independent Labour Party on the other (with its plea for 'Liberal, Tory and Socialist workers' to 'forget political differences' and unite to elect Labour representatives who were 'independent' of the existing parties).

Both Jim Larkin and James Connolly seem to have assumed such a development as the Bill to establish a 32 county home rule parliament went through the British House of Commons in 1912. The mainly Protestant members of the Belfast trade unions would, they felt, have no choice but to unite with Catholic trade unionists elsewhere in the country to press their common interests.

Such hopes were wrecked once the island was split into two states. As Connolly had predicted, partition meant 'a carnival of reaction, North and South'.

The working class in the North-East—at least half the national total—was bound even more tightly than before to Orangeism. Sectarianism did not undergo a long term decline in Belfast as it did in, say, Liverpool and Glasgow. There were periods in which reformist political organisations (especially the Northern Ireland Labour Party) seemed to make good progress, collecting up to a third of the vote. But they were smashed once the issue of the network of institutions that provided Protestant workers with advantages over Catholics was raised. This was true whether the question was pushed to the fore by Unionist politicians seeking to reassert their hold (as in the mid-1930s) or by Catholics demanding equal rights (as in the late 1960s).

Reformism in the North broke again and again on the rock of the Northern state: it was trying to get reforms through a state which rested on institutionalised division within the working class.

Reformism in the South was just as weak. It was possible to build quite powerful unions in Dublin and a few other towns: the heritage of 1913 was a very powerful tendency towards syndicalism. But Southern capitalism was too weak to be able to afford much in the way of state-distributed reforms.

The Southern Labour Party would grow for a period by campaigning for reforms, and then would very quickly lose support by entering coalition governments which could not deliver even the most meagre of gains for workers or small farmers.

The experience of betrayal at the hands of Labour ministers did not even lead, in the main, to the sort of left Labourism we know in Britain.

Instead, the most discontented workers, unemployed and poor farmers, turned from the idea of reforms through the state to Republican ideas of one sort or another. The main beneficiary of Labour's failure was the party of native Irish capitalism, Fianna Fail, with its claim to stand for fulfilment of national demands because its historic leader, De Valera, refused to endorse the treaty in 1921 and stood up the British in the 'economic war' of the 1930s.

The other beneficiaries were the hardline Republicans who ascribed the failure of either Labour or Fianna Fail to improve people's conditions to the continuing occupation of part of the island by Britain.

Reaction in the North and reaction in the South did indeed feed off each other. Without the weight which the workers of the North would have provided, resistance by the left in the South to clerical domination of the state was severely,

often fatally weakened. Socialists were literally forced to keep quiet or even to flee abroad by church-inspired persecution. And clerical domination of the South reinforced all the prejudices of Northern Protestant workers.

**M**ike Milotte argues that there was (and is) a way out of this double impasse. It lay in building an alternative to both working class reformist politics and non-working class republican politics: in revolutionary socialist working class politics.

Only by fighting both the Southern and the Northern states can you present an alternative that appeals to Protestant as well as Catholic workers, which overcomes the limitations both of reformism and Republicanism.

The book contains a wealth of detail, both about working class struggles and about the role of Communists in them, that no review can do justice to. Where else can you read about the coal and rail strikes in the 26 counties in the 1930s, the Belfast unemployed riots of 1932, the wartime strikes in the North's engineering factories and shipyards, the unemployed agitation in Dublin in the mid-1950s, the Republican Congress movement of the early 1930s and the rise of the civil rights movement in the late 1960s?

What emerges again and again from this detail is the way people, North and South of the border, have been attracted towards ideas they see as revolutionary socialist.

Every time the Republican movement faced a major crisis, some of its members moved seriously to the left: this was true as it faced defeat in the civil war in 1923, it was true after De Valera split from it in the years 1928-32, and it was true yet again after the failure of the guerrilla raids across the border in the 1950s.

Every time there was a real upsurge of working class struggle individual worker militants were won to a politics which seemed to go beyond the pale reformism of the Northern and Southern Labour parties—even though this meant Northern Protestants breaking with Orangeism and the politics of partition.

But Mike's history is also the history of the failure of these individuals to congeal into a revolutionary workers' party that could provide continuing leadership to much wider layers of the class.

In part the failure came from objective circumstances: the all too real pressures of unemployment and enforced emigration on militants, the way the Church put the ideological boot in every time there was a downturn in struggle, even the simple difficulty of finding the resources to get out a regular paper in a small country with an impoverished working class.

In part the failure came from the sheer complexity of the strategic and tactical issues facing even the smallest revolutionary organisation in Ireland: how do you relate both to Republican activists who are involved in military confrontation with the state but do not understand anything about trade unionism *and* to trade union activists who have not yet fully

broken with a reformism that identifies with the state?

How do you operate (indeed, at some points, even stay alive) in the sectarian, Orange working class communities in the North without back-tracking on the fight against the Orange state?

How, in practice, do you push independent working class struggles in the South and the Catholic ghettos of the North, without abstaining from the struggle Republicans are waging against the state—especially at times when the workers' struggle is at a low ebb and the military struggle seems all important?

These were very real problems, Mike shows, for the young Communist Party led by Roddy Connolly in the early 1920s, and they have been just as big a problem for revolutionaries in the last 16 years.

However, the decisive element in the failure Mike sees as lying in neither of these things, but in the impact of the Stalinism in completely distorting any discussion on strategy and tactics.

Even as early as the mid-1920s the Communist International ordered the Communist Party of Ireland to dissolve itself into an apparently larger organisation led by Jim Larkin—even though this seems to have been little more than a product of Larkin's imagination, with no branches, no meetings, no programme and no existence except for the purposes of parliamentary elections.

In the early 1930s the line from Moscow was to castigate all and sundry as 'social fascists' and 'bourgeois reactionaries'—and that the Communists (then called the Revolutionary Workers' Groups) duly did, making it all but impossible for them to build any sustained base out of the very hard and heroic work they did around particular struggles.

The line changed in the mid 1930s and the Communists quickly jumped to the opposite extreme, seeking popular fronts with Fianna Fail in the South (although by then it was attacking both the working class and the Republicans) and with 'progressive unionists' in the North. This attempt to placate at the same time people who were verbally anti-partitionist in the South and ardent supporters of partition in the North culminated in two separate parties, divided by the border.

Mike's book ends by looking at the last ten years. This is the most disappointing part of it: because its subject matter is 'official' Communism it does not seriously look at what genuine revolutionary socialists have done or could have done. So although it tells you some interesting things about the Stalinist influenced Workers' Party, it tells you less about those who are the real heirs of the people who formed the first Communist Party in 1921.

All you get are hints about what could be said. Because the new revolutionaries were not ruined by Stalinist conceptions, they could take the initiative in pushing forward the struggle of the Northern Catholics in 1968-69. But their youth and lack of theoretical clarity meant they did not have any real inkling of what that struggle would unleash.

Above all they did not have even the embryo of a party that would enable them to fight for a socialist programme within the civil rights move-

ment and to make sense of that programme to at least some of the more advanced trade unionists among the Protestant workers.

The result was that they were squeezed out of the leadership of the movement in the Catholic ghettos by the Provos and walled off by Loyalist thugs from even communicating with Protestant workers.

**W**e have been through more than a decade in which the only place in which revolutionary socialists could base themselves on real working class struggle has been in the South. But here too there have been very great difficulties.

The 1970s were in some ways the most successful period in the history of the Southern bourgeoisie. Successful manipulation of Common Market mechanisms attracted multinational capital, enabling a growth of industry, a rationalisation of agriculture, an improvement in workers' and small farmers' living standards, and for the first time in a century and a half, a higher level of re-immigration than of emigration.

For a period many of the features that had made the state so potentially unstable in the past were banished. It was as if the Irish bourgeoisie had been able to achieve its historic dream of nationhood, but within the cramped confines of the 26 counties. And the sense of security this gave to the middle classes translated itself into a certain placidity in the working class. Significantly, the rising political organisation within the working class in the late 1970s was the Workers' Party (the one time official Sinn Fein) with its gospel of reforms, collaboration with state and foreign capital to build up the national economy, and acceptance of the border.

Meanwhile, revolutionary socialists who had once been able to unleash movements which shook the Northern state to its foundations, found themselves consigned to the margins of political life.

Today there are some indications that the situation is once again changing. The Southern state's debts are beginning to catch up with it, inflation is damaging workers' living standards, unemployment is creating deep pools of discontent and rising emigration is once more eroding the general sense of stability. One symptom of this is an increase in Southern working class support for the Provos; another is an increase in the level of police repression.

One of the things which comes through very clearly in Mike Milotte's book is the way small groups of socialists have in the past moved very quickly from being marginal to being at the centre of great struggles. The difficulty, of course, is that you can only prepare for the moment when such quick movement is possible by the long, slow, arduous work of building at least the beginnings of a coherent organisation. That is the task our comrades in the Socialist Workers' Movement in Ireland have set themselves. If they are successful, they will have helped to provide the missing key to the Irish situation.

# Challenge to apartheid

SOUTH Africa's ruling National Party now face one of the most dangerous black challenges since they came to power in 1948. Louis le Grange, the Minister of Law and Order, believes that the unrest, which began in the black townships of the Transvaal at the end of August, is more serious than the great Soweto uprising of 1976.

The disturbances have been centred on the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging region (PWV), the vast industrial conurbation in the Transvaal which accounts for half the country's gross national product. Their highpoint so far has been what *The Economist* called 'the biggest political strike in the country's history' on 6 and 7 November. Some 70 percent of the PWV black workforce stayed at home.

To understand the significance of these events it is necessary to compare them with what happened in 1976. The Soweto rising was largely spontaneous. Discontents which had accumulated over a decade and a half of apparently unbreakable white supremacy suddenly exploded in June 1976.

The uprising occurred at a time when the organised black resistance was extremely weak. The underground organisation of the banned African National Congress (ANC) had just been hit by a wave of arrests. Leadership was largely provided by young militants influenced by the intellectuals of the black consciousness movement (BCM).

## New black rebellion

Steve Biko and other BCM leaders had neither the strategy nor the organisation needed to give the rebellion a coherent direction. Consequently, despite the heroism and energy of the youth of Soweto and other townships, the movement eventually fizzled out, hammered by increasingly severe repression.

The situation is very different today. The past eight years have seen the growth of a variety of black community and trade union organisations. Black political life has enjoyed a renaissance which recalls the struggles against the imposition of apartheid in the 1940s and 1950s. This revival has been given a degree of cohesion by the United Democratic Front (UDF).

The UDF was formed last year to coordinate opposition to President P W Botha's new constitution. Under the constitution, which came into force in September, the minority Asian and Coloured (mixed race) communities have been given chambers in the hitherto all-white Parliament. One of the UDF's chief successes to date was to organise a highly effective boycott of the elections to the new chambers.

The UDF is heavily influenced by the underground ANC. The ANC enjoyed a revival after 1976, recruiting many black youths radicalised by the rising who wanted to serve in its armed wing, *Umkonto*

*weSizwe*. ANC's guerrilla strategy suffered a severe blow after the loss of its main base, in Mozambique, following that country's non-aggression pact with South Africa, signed at the Nkomati river in March. Nevertheless the ANC's influence inside South Africa seems to be growing.

The other main change in the situation is the growth of the black trade union movement. The 1976 rising did spill over into the workplaces. There were no less than three stay-at-homes (political general strikes)—two in the Transvaal in August, 1976, each involving something over 100,000 black workers, and one in September, embracing half a million African and Coloured workers in the Transvaal and Eastern Cape. But the movement was largely community-based, centred on the black youth of the townships.

The focus of the recent disturbances has also largely been in the townships, particularly those of the Vaal Triangle south of Johannesburg, notably Sebokeng, Sharpeville and Boipatong, where the troubles began, and of the East Rand, around Pretoria. But the 6-7 November stay-at-home represented a major shift.

The strike was called by a committee of 38 community organisations and trade unions. Crucially, the two main independent union federations, the Federation of South African Unions (FOSATU) and the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA), backed the call.

These two groupings are the main beneficiaries of the explosive growth of black trade unions over the past ten years. FOSATU claims 106,000 members, CUSA 148,000.

FOSATU, in whose development radical white intellectuals have played a crucial role, has tried to develop strong workplace-based organisation on the British model. To this end, it has made a number of compromises with the white employers and the state which have drawn it into the highly collaborationist official industrial relations machinery.

CUSA, heavily influenced by the BCM, is mainly based in the Transvaal. Its most important affiliate is the new black National Union of Mineworkers, whose members came out on strike briefly in August.

Both groups had steered clear of the UDF, no doubt wary of its ANC links and, in FOSATU's case, worried about crossing the line between trade unionism and politics. Their support for the stay-at-home was therefore of great significance.

Involvement in the strike was massive. Some factory managers reported that only 10 percent of their employees went into work. Support was estimated to be highest in the Vaal Triangle, where 90 percent stayed away. In the East Rand, where the FOSATU-affiliated Metal and Allied Workers Union has a strong base, 85 percent of the workforce backed the strike. The stay-

at-home was weakest in Soweto itself, which has stayed relatively quiet during the recent unrest.

As in the past, the unevenness of the movement is one of its chief weaknesses. Outside the Rand, the disturbances have been worst in the Eastern Cape, traditionally a strong ANC area and the centre of the South African car industry. The multinationals based in the Port Elizabeth-Uitenhage area, Ford, General Motors and Volkswagen, have fed the discontent by laying off thousands of workers in their assembly plants and putting thousands more onto short-time working.

However, Durban, the country's second biggest industrial conurbation, has kept quite calm. This may be because of the influence of Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, boss of Kwazulu tribal homeland, and leader of the predominantly Zulu movement *Inkatha*, which claims a million members. Durban's townships are part of Kwazulu. Buthelezi has been performing his usual balancing act, denouncing both the new constitution and the UDF.

## Stay-at-home tactic

Should Botha ever feel compelled to make political concessions to the African majority, then Buthelezi would be the logical partner for any South African 'internal settlement'. But such a situation is still far off.

The regime has responded to the disturbances by tightening the repressive screw. 7,000 troops and police were deployed on 23 October to search the Vaal Triangle townships for what Le Grange called 'revolutionary...criminal and intimidatory elements.'

Twenty-four people were killed during the 6-7 November stay-at-home. The strike was followed by the arrest of FOSATU and CUSA leaders and the sacking of 6,000 workers at the two main plants of SASOL, the state coal-into-oil corporation. Their offence was to have taken part in the stay-at-home.

It would be a mistake to underestimate the repressive capacities of the apartheid regime. The recent clampdown has been mild compared to the early 1960s or 1976-77. Moreover, the stay-at-home is a comparatively traditional tactic in South Africa, and one which the regime's formidable security apparatus has long experience of dealing with.

The limitations of the tactic were pointed out by South African revolutionary socialists writing in this review's sister journal, *International Socialism*, as long ago as 1961.

'Firstly, the people of the townships cannot stay at home indefinitely. To do so is to starve... The townships can be sealed off and starved out only too effectively by small detachments of the army and the police...

'Secondly, by staying in the townships, the worker surrenders all initiative. He cuts himself off from his fellow workers in other townships. He divides himself from his allies in the rural areas, and he surrenders the entire economic centre to his enemies.'

The fundamental weakness of the stay-at-home is that it centres the struggle on the community. This marries well with the strategy pursued by the ANC both in the 1950s and today, of mobilising a broad alliance of *all* black classes and of white 'democrats' against the regime.

But it is the collective economic strength increasingly exercised by black workers in production which represents the only force capable of overthrowing the regime. This

power underlies the growth of the black trade unions.

The economic depression afflicting South Africa has caused trade union militancy to fall off somewhat. 1982 saw more strike-days (141,517) than any year since the great 1973 Durban strikes. A succession of bitter strikes were fought, notably in the metal industry. The employers won most of them. Strike-days more than halved in 1983, falling to 64,469 under the impact of the recession.

Retreat on the economic front may help to explain the willingness of black workers in the Rand and Eastern Cape to take part in broader community-based movements.

The South African economy is expected to begin reviving in 1985. This will provide an opportunity to rebuild and extend the power of the black trade unions. Only if this power is mobilised against the white state will apartheid ultimately be broken. ■

Alex Callinicos

## CHINA

# Deng's road west

WESTERN commentators have an ever growing admiration for the Chinese regime these days. China is following a path which means much closer economic integration with the west, and which has opened up new markets for western capitalism.

Alain Cass of the *Financial Times* provides a typical example of this admiration with the following:

'Compared to the penury of life under Mao Tse Tung and later the Gang of Four, there is a veritable explosion of affluence. The shops are packed with consumer goods, the commune has been abolished and many peasants are getting rich. More and more Chinese are turning their hand to private enterprise and making money.'

For western commentators this new Chinese dream of a land of Coke, jeans, MacDonalds and make-up is one to be welcomed. China it would seem is coming to its senses at last.

All of this appears to be confirmed by the deal between Thatcher and Deng Xiaoping concerning the future of Hong Kong. Thatcher clearly does not fancy a confrontation with China and is obviously keen to

show her new partners in a good light. For China, 35 years after the founding of the 'People's Republic', the deal represents a major step on the road to modernisation.

The deal goes under the heading 'two systems, one country'. This means the continued existence of private capitalism in Hong Kong is guaranteed after the Chinese takeover in 1997. This goes hand in hand with the 'programme of the four modernisations' on the mainland. Agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defence are the four areas which the Chinese are attempting to modernise.

In its own terms the modernisation programme has certainly enjoyed some success. A cursory glance at the industrial sector of the economy shows that the reforms have made a major contribution to the reduction of inefficiency and waste that was a hallmark of Chinese industry during the reign of the Gang of Four.

They have centred around the attempts to make the major cities centres of growth, and in the encouragement of overseas investments in China, particularly in the form of US dollars.

National planning is being subordinated

to the cut and thrust of the market economy. Industrial administration is being decentralised, and each firm is responsible for its own profit and loss. The state refuses to subsidise those that make losses. Profits are not returned to the state, but will either take the form of higher wages or new investment.

In order to attract foreign investment, the regime has opened up a series of Special Economic Zones, where investors are offered low rents, tax concessions and cheap labour. Overseas companies are also encouraged to enter into joint ventures with Chinese firms. These have met with some success. The American Motor Company (AMC) have invested 16 million dollars in one such venture, giving them approximately one third ownership in the scheme. Volkswagen have also begun an operation in Shanghai.

In addition to all these ventures aimed at getting foreign investment, the government are also seeking major loans from both the World Bank and various private banks.

In agriculture the pace of change has been more rapid, and the results more dramatic. The introduction of the 'household responsibility scheme' has contributed greatly to a rise in the standard of living of a section of the peasantry. Each household is allocated a plot of land under the scheme, and is responsible for the supply of a fixed amount of produce to the state, anything left over may be sold on the free market for private



In America they'd earn 22 dollars per hour, in Japan 12...but in China 60 cents!



profit. For those who live in arable regions close to big cities there is clearly money to be made.

An additional source of wealth has also come to those in provinces where industrial production is high. Here high levels of investment in agricultural machinery and chemistry has freed workers from labour in the fields, and allowed them to work in industry, thus allowing less competition on the land and so higher incomes for all concerned.



**Do things go better?**

All this has allowed very extravagant claims to be made by both the Chinese government, and their new found western admirers. In truth though, these improvements benefit only a small section of the population. For the vast majority of workers, life is still lived in conditions of immense hardship. Exploitation remains as intense as ever.

The western reporters who wave the banner of 'modern up-to-date China' forget some of the basic facts of Chinese life. Chinese workers have to endure a minimum eight-hour day, six-day week with only five days holiday each year. Severe labour discipline, no health and safety protection, speed-ups in production, and awful living conditions, in which few have running water or private toilets, are the realities for Chinese workers.

On top of these conditions are the low wages so important for attracting foreign investment. At the ACM venture wage costs were something like 60 cents per hour, compared to 22 dollars per hour in the US, and 12 dollars per hour in Japan.

Little wonder western commentators are so fond of the regime.

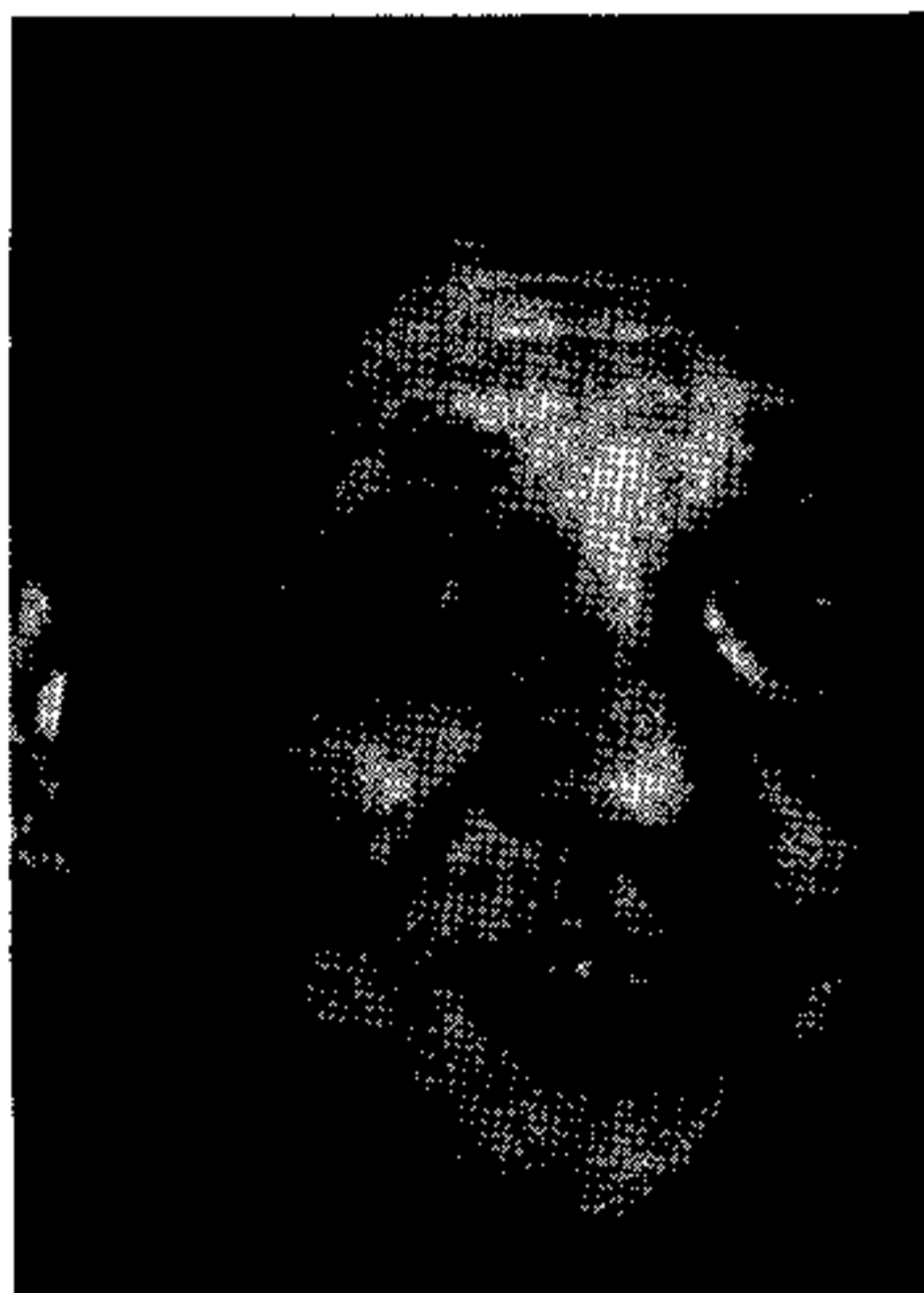
Large scale unemployment continues to be a real problem, and whilst some may be benefitting, the gap between rich and poor, big peasant and small peasant, workers in the more advanced sectors of the economy and those in the more backward, continues to grow. In other words increasing inequality is becoming a feature of the system.

All this said however, there is no doubt that workers have made real economic gains

under the regime of Deng Xiaoping, but this in turn has created problems for the government. The level of opposition, unofficial, but with roots in the working class, grew out of the liberalisation in the early days of Deng's regime.

That liberalisation was necessary in order to carry the campaign against the Gang of Four, and to rehabilitate Deng and his followers. But the spin off into demands for independent trade unions and freedom of expression were not quite what Deng had intended.

The regime has responded with two huge waves of repression, which have sought to deal with opposition from both inside and outside the Communist Party. The first wave occurred in the spring of '81 and those lucky enough to survive it without arrest were forced underground. However it is likely that few survived the 1983 'crackdown on crime'.



**Deng Xiaoping**

Under the cloak of the need to deal with the growing crime rate, hundreds of thousands were arrested, particularly among unemployed youth. In addition, thousands convicted of more serious crimes were executed. The Public Security Bureau saw that large numbers under its surveillance ended up in labour camps.

These campaigns against 'spiritual pollution' (crime and western influence), and 'rectifying the party' (an end to factions) were directed both against old elements associated with the Gang of Four and the cultural revolution, and also against those who took the right turn too far.

In the long term these purges will not solve the tensions within the bureaucracy. In a country such as China, a state capitalist regime with a heavy bureaucracy, twists and turns in central policy have frequently led to purges of the most adventurous advocates of past policies. As yesterday's orthodoxy becomes tomorrow's heresy, conservatism becomes a crucial factor for long term survival. But the rivalries continue. Deng's personal popularity and standing allows him to control these tensions, but in the event of a fall in his popularity, or of his death, it is

likely that new factional strife will break out on a large scale.

Even more serious are the problems the regime could encounter with its own working class. Modernisation of the Chinese economy can only really be achieved if the state can continue to raise productivity in both industry and agriculture. Yet once the more glaring inefficiencies and waste of the past have been eliminated, continued higher productivity will only be achieved by progressively more drastic exploitative measures being taken against Chinese workers. This can only lead to direct confrontation with a working class whose aspirations have grown with the modernisation of the regime.

Many commentators from both the left and the right see the 'four modernisations' as an indication that China is turning its back on socialism and adopting capitalist ways. However if the term socialism is to include workers' control and workers' democracy, which for Marxists it must, then one can only conclude that China is as far away from socialism now as it has been since Mao's armies liberated China's workers in 1949.

Although the ownership of land and the means of production in legal terms is public, control of production remains firmly locked in the grasp of the state capitalist ruling class. A ruling class which has shown itself to be as ruthless as any in the world in defence of its position of power. Recent developments can only be understood as the logic of China's realisation that accumulation cannot be achieved except in harness with the world economy.



**Reflecting the west**

It is this realisation that the west admires so much, and it is the eventual logic of the regime that has taken it down the road it travels today. What has occurred is not a counter revolution, but a modernisation of the existing regime. For those on the left who placed so much hope in China the lesson to be learned is that where workers have no control over industry, agriculture, the state, the party, and in effect their own lives, it is possible for regimes with the highest of ideals to eventually end up as China today. ■

**Martin May**

# A lost revolutionary

ONE OF the last survivors of the Communist International's heroic early years has just died in Paris at the age of 88. Boris Souvarine was one of the founders of the French Communist Party, its representative on the Executive Committee of the Comintern until 1924, and perhaps Trotsky's closest colleague outside Russia in those early years.

Born Boris Lifschitz of Jewish parents in the Russian town of Kiev in 1895, he emigrated with his family to France when still a young child. He joined the French Socialist Party (SFIO) in his late teens and became an active member of its revolutionary left wing. In 1914 Souvarine's political world, like that of most committed socialists throughout Europe, collapsed dramatically. On 4 August the German and French Socialist parties, huge mass working class organisations, voted war credits to their governments.

Overnight internationalism was replaced by nationalism, class struggle by class collaboration. The first world war had begun. The excuse for this miserable and craven capitulation was the same then as it has ever been: if they had resisted the war fever of the masses, their followers would have deserted them in droves. Once the promised speedy victory had failed to materialise however, the reformists showed themselves in their true colours.

As the war developed into the daily grind of mutual mass slaughter, the official leaders of French socialism put all their energy into silencing opposition and repressing discontent. Tiny knots of opposition were broken up and militants transferred to the front line. Souvarine was one of the few dissidents left at large and he threw himself into the task of organising opposition.

## The Russian Revolution

By 1916 three wings were clearly discernible in the SFIO: a right wing leadership totally committed to the war effort, openly endorsing the annexationist ambitions of the Allies; a centre, rapidly growing in number but confused or prevaricating politically, led by Jean Longuet, Marx's grandson; and a left, led by Souvarine and Fernand Loriot, but with close ties to revolutionary syndicalists outside the party, like Alfred Rosmer and Pierre Monatte. All of these were to be key figures in the struggle to set up a communist party in France after the war.

The advent of the Russian revolution in 1917 transformed the political situation in France. Souvarine hailed the Bolshevik revolution as a magnificent inspiration to socialists everywhere. Within the Committee for the Resumption of International Relations (CRIR), where left and centre worked uneasily together, Souvarine and Loriot pushed for a more radical posture.

When the war finally ended in an Allied

victory, the centre quickly ditched its left wing allies and made a deal with the right. The more compromised social chauvinists were discreetly removed from leading positions for the time being but no attempt was made to alter the essential reformism of the party. For its part the left was convinced that a clean break with the past was essential. Souvarine helped set up the Committee for the Third International which pressed for the SFIO to join the Third or Communist International set up by the Bolsheviks after their seizure of power, and pledge full support for the embattled Soviet regime.

In early 1920 Souvarine set up the *Bulletin Communiste* which hammered out the lessons of the Russian revolution for French socialists. The battle inside the SFIO was now joined in deadly earnest. A massive series of strikes shook France in early 1920, and the state, ably abetted by the collaborating leadership of the French trade union movement (CGT) undertook a wave of repression. Militants were rounded up in their hundreds, and troops used freely to smash the strikes. Even from prison Souvarine continued his political activity, smuggling out articles, motions and advice to those of his comrades still at liberty.

Finally in December 1920 the great break took place at the Congress of Tours where on Souvarine's motion a majority was won for immediate adhesion to the Communist International and expulsion of the reformists.

Souvarine was immediately elected to a leading position in the new party and sent to Moscow to be its delegate on the Comintern's Executive Committee.

The triumph of the left was however far from complete. Many leading figures of the old centre, rather than disappear into the political wilderness, pretended to agree to the 21 conditions in order to retain their political positions.

Men such as Frossard and Cachin continued to lead the new party in very much the same spirit in which they had led the old SFIO. It was to take the left a further two years before they were really able to claim that a revolutionary communist party existed in France. Souvarine played a crucial role in these years, urging his French comrades to learn from the experience of the International and above all to accept the revolutionary discipline of being a section of the revolutionary world party. It was in these years that he became a very close collaborator with Trotsky.

It was this political relationship that was to prove his undoing. For, almost at the very moment the left had finally triumphed in the French party, Trotsky was falling out with the nascent state capitalist bureaucracy in Russia. With Lenin dead, the triumvirate of Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev moved against Trotsky. One of the crucial weapons they used against him was to abuse

Zinoviev's position in the leadership of the International and to remove Trotsky's main supporters from any positions of influence there.

Souvarine was the perfect target. A series of manoeuvres was begun, a faction carefully built up around Zinoviev's loyal French lieutenant, Albert Treint, and by mid 1924 with the campaign against the 'Trotskyist deviation from Leninism' in full sway, Souvarine found himself expelled from the party he had worked so hard to found.

He was not alone. Within months he had been followed by nearly all his closest comrades from the war years. The roll call of those expelled at this time reads like a roll of honour of French communists: Souvarine, Rosmer, Monatte, Loriot, Dunois...all exemplary and devoted revolutionary socialists. This time there was to be no road back. The campaign to turn the Communist Parties, indeed the International as a whole into the loyal servant of Soviet foreign policy was in full stride.

Souvarine did not give up without a fight. Expelled from the party, he relaunched his old journal, the *Bulletin Communiste*. For the next few years Souvarine continued to expound the basic principles of revolutionary socialism, analysing the terrible developments in Russia with unparalleled accuracy and clarity, publishing many documents of Trotsky and the opposition, calling again and again for a return to the 'road of Lenin and Trotsky'.

As defeat followed defeat, from the British General Strike to the massacred Chinese Revolution, to the expulsion of Trotsky from the Soviet Union, even Souvarine began to lose heart. Like so many others he began to feel that there was perhaps some basic flaw at the heart of things, some kind of 'original sin' in Leninism that led to Stalinism.

## The sad decline

By 1929 this line of thinking had led him away from revolutionary politics altogether. Exiled from Russia, Trotsky sought to win him back, writing him a series of impassioned and superbly argued letters. Souvarine's replies themselves make sad reading, revealing no new insights, only a stale rehash of old reformist arguments against Bolshevism that he himself had so brilliantly dealt with ten years earlier.

In later years Souvarine devoted himself to academic study of the Soviet Union. He still managed to produce something of interest even in this corrupting environment: his biography of Stalin was the first serious and critical work on the evil genius of state capitalism to be published and is still worth reading today. But his fate was like too many of his generation. It is a very real tragedy that so many gifted militants have been lost to the revolutionary movement, perhaps one of the most serious crimes that Stalinism has committed in its long and gory history.

If 'the party is the memory of the class', then part of the struggle to build a revolutionary party will always be to remember our own history, the struggles and contributions of those who came before us. Boris Souvarine was one of ours. ■

Philip Spencer

# The price of coal

COALMINING is a tough and dangerous occupation. Many disasters have claimed the lives of thousands of people, not to mention the thousands more killed as a result of inhaling the choking black dust which destroys the lungs, and the falls of stone which kill or cripple the men who spend their working lives underground.

But death and injury are not the only by-products of coalmining. Militancy is another, and some of the greatest working class fighters in history have been miners. These include men like Thomas Hepburn who, in 1830 formed the Durham miners into a union and was blacklisted for his courageous stand, dying a broken man, or A J Cook, who despite his weaknesses, was an inspired leader, dedicated in his fight against the coal owners. He also died a broken man, in 1931, at the young age of 46. As well as these famous examples, there were countless others who contributed to the reputation of the miners, earning them the title of 'vanguard of the working class'.

One such man was Lewis Jones, a Welshman, who wrote down his experiences of mining life in the Rhondda Valley in the form of two novels, *Cwmardy* and *We live*. He hoped that his readers would better understand the terrible pay and conditions of the miners in the Rhondda in this way, rather than by looking at the piles of statistics and official reports.

## Tonypandy riots

Lewis Jones had plenty of personal experience to draw on. He was born in 1897, in Clydach Vale, mid-Rhondda. As a boy of twelve he began working down the pit at Cambrian Colliery which was part of the Cambrian Combine run by D A Thomas, later Lord Rhondda, and one of the biggest shits of his time.

As a boy, Jones witnessed the riots in Tonypandy when Churchill sent in troops to break a strike which was caused by the wage-cutting policies of the owners. Although the strike was ultimately defeated, it did lead to the first ever national strike in 1912, in pursuance of a minimum wage.

Before the end of the First World War, Jones became the youngest ever Chairman of the Cambrian Lodge, going on to attend the Central Labour College in London between 1923-25 and joining the Communist Party in the process. He developed into an inspiring and powerful orator and in 1926 he was jailed for three months after being arrested for making seditious speeches in the Nottinghamshire coalfield.

The betrayal and defeat of the miners in 1926 put the union on the defensive. They were forced to try to prevent the spread of scab unions. In 1929, Jones was sacked from his job of checkweighman for refusing to work with scab labour. He never worked in the pits again. Instead, he became Welsh organiser for the National Unemployed

Workers Movement, leading three of the great hunger marches from South Wales in the thirties and used his talent for public speaking to gain support for the anti-fascist cause in Spain.

He died suddenly in 1939, after having addressed 30 street meetings in one day. His heart gave up, something his mind had never done, even in the face of one of the most disheartening periods for socialists seen until the arrival of Thatcher.

After such a full and politically active life, it is a wonder he ever found time to write his novels. But he did and they have become classics of working class literature. We must be grateful that he did for they give a graphic illustration of life in the Rhondda, once the most productive coal-mining valley in the world.

*Cwmardy* has got faults, notably in the

washed the inquiry, keep on the offensive and effectively cut wages. They are confident the men will accept after a short protest strike which they will not be able to sustain through lack of finance and leadership.

Like MacGregor, they totally underestimate the strength of the miners when they know they are right, and a long and bitter strike takes place. Great hardship is endured by the miners and their families. Despite this, they remain as solid as a rock, fighting police, scab officials and, finally, troops who murder some of the strikers. The strikers emerge victorious when the owners give in after ten months.

## Police violence

The miners of today who believe the violence of the police is something new, should read this book. All the tactics being used against them—police horses, harassment, baton charges—have all been used before, and not just against miners. With organisation at rank and file level, they can be defeated, even when it seems as if the forces ranged against them are impregnable.



Strike pay being given out at Tonypandy, November 1910

narrative, which is full of literary prose which at times is unconvincing coming from the mouths of uneducated miners. But despite this, when life underground is being described, the reader can almost feel the choking atmosphere of the pit as the miners toil and sweat in the claustrophobic confinement of the coalface. The search for survivors after an explosion underground and the subsequent 'official inquiry' fill the reader with horror and loathing at a system where need is subservient to profit and where the dead miner, Shoni Cap-du, is blamed for the death of his mates, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

As one man says, 'What do hundred men count 'longside a hundred trams of coal? Men be cheap 'nough these days, and will soon be dear at ten a penny.'

The coal owners, after having white-

As Len Roberts, central character of the novel says, when the owners threaten to use troops if their 'final' offer is not accepted:

'Who is this Home Secretry who calls us hooligans and savages? He don't belong to us, that's why he sends his soldiers here to drive us back to the pit. Ha. He'll never beat our men that way. If we are to die, let it be fighting in the clean air that the pit has robbed us of for so long. Better to die like that than from starvation by an empty grate in the back kitchen.'

This has to be the attitude of miners today. If they crawl back to work defeated not only will they be betraying the men killed during this strike, they will also lose all the benefits gained by the struggles of their forefathers, who shed their blood in the hope that a true socialist society could become a reality. ■

Norman Strike

## Contemptuous and condescending

**The Diary of Beatrice Webb, Vol 3, 1895-1924.**  
**The Power to Alter Things**  
*Virago, £20*

SIDNEY and Beatrice Webb were among the chief architects of modern Labour Party politics. Until the passing of the 1918 Constitution (with its famous Clause 4 on 'common ownership' of the means of production) and the programme — *Labour and the New Social Order*, the Party did not regard itself as socialist. Both these documents were drafted by Sidney Webb. They are still considered to be the cornerstones of Labour's version of socialism.

Both the Webbs co-operated closely throughout their lives, and this means Beatrice's diary is important because it reveals some of the thinking that has shaped the Labour leadership to the present day. If it were not for this fact, a review of the 1895-1924 diary would be out of place in this magazine. In the diary Beatrice emerges as a master of the reactionary comment. Let her speak for herself.

The 1905 Russian revolution: 'government of any sort is coming to an end in Russia.' Britain's pre-war mass strikes were equivalent to Germany's imperialist expansion: 'in both cases there was the excuse that the existing distribution of the good things of life was unfair'. Demonstrations against the outbreak of war in 1914: 'It was an undignified and futile exhibition, this singing of the "Red Flag" and passing of well-worn radical resolutions in favour of universal peace.'

The Easter 1916 rising in Dublin: 'criminal lunacy'. The Bolshevik revolution: 'the collapse of Russia'. When workers overthrew the Kaiser in 1918 this meant: 'a continent in rampant revolution over which there will be no government to which we can dictate our terms'. The 1919 railway strike: 'no sane person can defend'. The 1920 miners' strike for pay was unjustified because: 'they are earning, as a matter of fact, as much money as they can spend in their comparatively low state of civilisation.'

### Middle class arrogance

The diary is not just a mass of reactionary and often racist statements. It tells us of the condescending attitude of the middle class intellectuals who, along with trade union leaders, have dominated the top echelons of the Labour Party throughout its life. According to Beatrice, Sidney was 'the ideal "man at the desk" — thinking, devising, scheming and drafting ideas and devising actions for subordinates to carry out'.

This very arrogance gave the Webbs a detachment which allowed sharp insights into the behaviour of many trade union leaders. This is how she explained Labour's entry into the wartime coalition government:

'To enjoy an income of £4,000 a year, or even of £1,000, for a year or two, means to any trade union official personal independence for the rest of his life. But I don't believe that this pecuniary motive was dominant ... Their main motive ... is the illusion that the mere presence of labour men in the government, apart from anything they do or prevent being done, is in itself a sign of democratic progress.'

We see also the restraining influence of Labour leaders on workers' struggles. Beatrice Webb goes into some detail to show how in 1919, with the British state at its weakest, Sidney helped divert the miners into accepting a Govern-

ment commission on nationalisation and wages, rather than taking direct action. Sidney had a 'rollicking good time' doing this, but the opportunity missed for striking paved the way for a series of disasters which ended with the sell-out of the General Strike in 1926.

At no point does the diary support a strike, for in such actions workers fight *for themselves*. Beatrice hated this and hoped strikes would fail as: 'defeat will drive the organised worker into political (ie parliamentary) action and probably strengthen the Labour Party'. What then did the Webb's vision of 'socialism' consist of? The diary shows it involved a dislike of the unregulated nature of private capitalist competition and a belief in the efficiency of state planning. Workers' activity and self-emancipation had no place in this scheme. It merely got in the way of the 'experts' plans. There are many elements of this thinking still alive in the speeches of the

Kinnocks, Healeys and Hattersleys. This review does not wish to deride the millions who still hope in vain that somehow the next Labour administration will be better than the dismal failures which preceded it. On the contrary, there is a vast gulf separating most rank and file Labour supporters from their leadership. The one enduring image which rises from practically every page of the diary is the contempt the Webbs had for ordinary Labour Party members and trade unionists. Thus the description of Ramsay MacDonald, Labour leader and soon to be arch-traitor to the movement is as follows:

'Macdonald, with his romantic figure, charming voice and clever dialectics, is more than a match for all those underbred and undertrained workmen who surround him on the platform and face him in the audience.'

The Beatrice Webb diary contains not one idea that could take the working class forward. But every Labour Party member should read it. They would learn a lot about their so-called 'leaders'. ■

Donny Gluckstein

## A revolutionary witness

Agnes Smedley  
**China Correspondent**  
*Pandora Books, £3.95*

THE WAR between Japan and China (1937-1946) and the preceding years of turmoil described in this book provides the setting for an inevitable confrontation between modernity and feudalism. The author imparts an optimism that the 'new' will conquer over the 'old'.

Agnes Smedley was a journalist who witnessed and participated in the revolutionary days which led to the liberation of China. She was never a member of the Communist Party but was profoundly influenced by the Stalinist legacy of the Russian Revolution. So she believed that China had to progress through stages from feudalism to national democracy, then socialism.

She was mistaken about the evolutionary nature of socialism but her book is worth reading. It is a graphic portrayal of the exertions and efforts of millions of men, women and children as they break from feudalism.

The best details describe how the peasantry built their villages against the landlords and the Japanese armies, how women leapt from being passive foot-bound objects to becoming active initiators mobilizing against landlords and opium merchants.

The book is a mass of details about conditions in China—a

governor's widow requisitions \$20,000 for his funeral when a child earns eighty cents a year. The barriers of language and culture are surmounted as Agnes Smedley's work takes her into the homes and the struggles of Chinese workers.

The book is weakest when her own politics intrude.



Agnes Smedley in 1929

She was acquiescent to the dictates of Russian foreign policy. Running through the book is a contrast between the just and democratic reforms carried out by the Red Army in the provinces which they controlled and the vile, corrupt, and reactionary traditions which prevailed in Kuomintang held regions. But the Communist Party approach was to seek out 'progressive' nationalist generals

and governors to unite with the communists and liberate the people. The working class is absent and class struggle becomes reduced to two protagonists—reaction versus democracy.

The policy of class collaboration with the 'progressive' sections of the bourgeoisie produced tragic results. Thousands of communists and their supporters were massacred by the nationalist armies while the Communist Party leadership proclaimed loyalty to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek in the interest of national unity. Peasants who loyally worked the land in 'liberated zones' found that they had to pay rent and return the land. The seizures of land by peasants were denounced as 'excesses', which would alienate the liberal-minded landlords.

The book ends in 1941 when she leaves China due to ill health. The Communist Party eventually defeated the Kuomintang in 1949 and embarked on building 'socialism in China'. After 35 years, the experiment is a failure. Hong Kong, leased to the British by a Chinese Emperor has had its lease extended for another 50 years by the present regime. The interests of workers and peasants remain subordinate to policies which are supposed to represent the interests of the nation.

Those who continue to believe in Maoism would blame the present leadership who are supposed to

have usurped power from Mao's designated heirs.

Unintentionally, Agnes Smedley's book reveals why the nature of the Maoist leadership in 1949 has produced the policies in China today. When the CCP turned to the peasantry, it opened the leadership of the revolution to the intelligentsia. The theory of a necessary democratic stage before socialism fitted the aspirations of those nationalists who realised that the Kuomintang was incapable of freeing China from European and Japanese imperialism.

The Red Army was created as the instrument which would bring liberation to the masses. Socialism cannot be built by the rational and intelligent policies of politicians; nor can it be built by the peasantry.

The working class, which was the subject of the revolution in Russia, played no part as the active subject of the revolution in China. Mao and the present Chinese leadership had the same aim which was to build a strong and independent China. The earlier isolationist policies have been abandoned. Neither the interests of Chinese workers nor peasants will be allowed to get in the way of the achievement of this goal. ■

Laurence Wong

## A liberal apology

Lenin and the end of politics

A J Polan

Methuen, £5.95

TAKE A simplistic right wing argument. Express it in the most convoluted language. Fill it out with all the most pseudy quotes from fashionable sociologists and philosophers.

That is the method of the writer of this book.

His central contention is that the greatest horror of our age is Stalinism. So much so that other horrors—the debt-induced famines in Africa, the US-backed murder squads of Latin America, the wars in the gulf and the Eritrea, the massacres in the Lebanon, mass unemployment, the threat of nuclear holocaust—do not receive a single mention. And Stalinism, he insists, is an inevitable outcome of any attempt by human beings to totally change society.

Any such attempt, he argues, ignores the profound insights of people like Max Weber into the inevitability of bureaucracy in 'modern' society. 'Realistic politics' consists in seeing that only 'powerful' parliamentary structures

can control bureaucracy.

The result is the whole system of terror which goes under the name 'Gulag'.

The greatest threat to our age is the 'myth of apocalypse'—his term for the fight for freedom from famine, war, unemployment, and so on.

Lenin was responsible for Stalinism because he propagated this myth, claims Polan. And the responsibility does not even lie with *What is to be done*, as many liberals and social democrats have claimed, but with *The state and the revolution*. For it is here that Lenin 'denies politics' and suggests human beings can truly be free.

But it is not only Lenin who produced Stalinism by spreading this 'myth'. He was but the last in a long line of dangerous thinkers, going right back through Karl Marx to Jean Jacques Rousseau.

We are enjoined to stand fast against this 'myth' and to hold firm to the limited changes possible in a liberal democracy, based upon the 'literate culture' of an 'elite' which accepts the 'post enlightenment Helleno-Judaic-Christian subject'.

The argument is not new. It was propounded a generation ago by apologists for the first cold war, such as Talmon in *The rise of totalitarian democracy* and Popper in *The open society and its enemies* and *The poverty of historicism*.

Missing from the argument is any understanding of what truly drives forward present day societies, whether in the East or the West. That driving force is not some text from 1917, still less from 1760. Poland and Chile, the USSR and the USA, Britain and South Africa, China and the Philippines are all bound by a single dynamic because their rulers are all willing participants in a global system of competitive accumulation.

### Global system

'Totalitarianism', the 'gulag', and even Weber's 'bureaucracy' are by-products of the impact of this global system on particular societies at particular stages in their development. If you don't see this, you can't see why Khrushchev's Russia differed from Stalin's, why the 'free world' covers a terroristic dictatorship like Haiti as well as liberal democracy like Luxembourg, why Poland's debt crisis is so much like Brazil's.

Polan's book is, in fact, quite inconsequential. It is what you might expect from a member of the liberal middle classes who has decided to separate himself off as much as possible from people who might have 'apocalyptic urges' in the face of a world of wars and famines.

But it is of a limited wider interest for two reasons.

First Polan himself (and at least three of the people he offers 'gratitude' to for helping him develop his ideas) was once a member of the International Socialists (the predecessor of the SWP).

He left 12 years ago as part of a grouping which denounced us for characterising Russia as state capitalist, for holding that Western capitalism did not then face imminent collapse, and for rejecting as mystical talk the theory of a 'transitional epoch'. The various elements in the grouping split apart, to give us as well as Polan and his friends, the Revolutionary Communist Group (which now praises the virtues of Jaruzelski's Poland) and the Revolutionary Communist Party (which moved quickly, once the miners' strike had started from way out ultra-leftism to campaigning for a national ballot).

Polan has gone full circle to complete renegacy. Yet there is a continuity between Polan's views now and his ideas back in 1972.

## Learning from struggle

All those in favour

Peter Fairbrother

Pluto Press, £2.95

*All Those in Favour* is a book about the politics of trade unions written by a lecturer in sociology — and it shows.

Don't misunderstand me. Any book with a genuine concern for union democracy and improving the aims and performance of the trade union movement is to be welcomed by all serious trade union militants and revolutionary socialists. Indeed, thousands of trade unionists have been grappling with this problem for years and it's been my privilege to be one of them.

But the problem with this book isn't so much the subject matter, it's more the style and treatment that the author gives to that subject.

The arguments and the evidence are all presented in the style of a PhD thesis (which it probably was). So, for example, the book deals with how different unions work — whether they have a branch ballot or a secret ballot by post; the difference between delegates and representatives; the difficulty that women face in unions, and how some unions are trying to solve them. Fairbrother tackles a whole range of subjects which hold back the movement, and which should be of interest (and help) to all of us.

But for me the politics of union

democracy are not some abstract argument about facts and figures. What's more it can't be limited to questions of procedure or constitutions, important though they both are. Union democracy has to be about more than that. It must also include the blood and guts of the class struggle.

I'd go further: such a book has got to include the living, breathing, often frustrating, sometimes even bloody — and always costly — class struggle, because there can be no improvement in the democratic processes within the trade union movement without it. And you don't have to be a docker or a miner to find the evidence. There is a wealth of material.

### Strikes

For example as I write the miners' and the dockers' strikes are continuing. Scabs always make charges about the lack of democracy and the need for a ballot. Socialists should always have a critique of how any strike is being pursued. To what extent the rank and file are being involved. How often are mass meetings being held? Are reports being given on the conduct of the strike? Are there local strike committees and what is their composition? Do they include the rank and file militants or just shop stewards and officials? If it's a

national strike is there a delegate based national strike committee?

A book that confronted those living practical aspects of union democracy might go on to compare one strike with another. What were the positive and what were the negative aspects of say the 1972 docks strike compared to the two docks strikes of 1984? Or the 1972 miners' strike compared with today's miners' strike? Or even a comparison between the 1972 docks strike and the miners' strike of 1984? The combinations of struggles are endless.

Dockers, miners, indeed any militant trade unionist, could learn enormously from these experiences, because, for socialists, democracy isn't an abstract principle. Essentially it's about how to sharpen and develop our class's ability to fight.

It seems to me that here was an opportunity to write a readable, even an exciting book, about a subject vitally important not only for trade union democracy but for democracy in general. Instead we have a rather dull and boring book which will be read not by miners and dockers or civil servants and hospital porters but by a few sociology students and lecturers. It makes very little contribution to understanding trade unionism, and absolutely none to changing anything. It seems such a pity. ■

Eddie Prevost

Those ideas, typical of much of the left, were based upon a glib acceptance of the ready made ideas about 'socialist' and 'capitalist' countries which did away with the need for any serious analysis of the real dynamic of any part of the world. It is this lack of real analysis which still enables Polan's erstwhile comrades in the RCG and RCP to move off in such dubious directions.

Meanwhile Polan himself has turned the old glib ideas upside down, to move from the easy illusions of the early 1970s to the easy disillusion of the 1980s. His present day ideas are the mirror image of his old ones: where once the Eastern states were 'transitional', without a dynamic of their own, and therefore *progressive*, today they are still seen as being without dynamic, but as being 'totalitarian' and the greatest threat to humanity.

The second significant thing about Polan's book is the way in which he has moved to his present ideas using the intellectual jargon that used to be associated with a school of academic Marxism—that of the structuralism associated with Louis Althusser. The Althusserian theoretical system enabled the academics of the post 1968 generation to dress up support for the easy certainties of Stalinism in a terminology which gave the impression of scientific rigour. Now its collapse is providing the ideological garbage needed by people like Polan. ■

Chris Harman

## A mirror of Labour thinking

**The Idea of Neighbourhood**  
Jeremy Seabrook  
Pluto Press £4.95

ANY work that states it is 'a celebration of one of the bravest initiatives to have been undertaken by any local authority in Britain in recent years' needs to be examined seriously.

*The Idea of Neighbourhood* is a celebration and supposed history of events in an urban sprawl in the West Midlands: Walsall. This town and its Labour Party's decentralisation plans and neighbourhood offices, has given the blueprint to decentralisation plans in Islington and Hackney. It has been variously described as 'the second Bologna' after the Communist controlled Italian city, or 'the Kremlin in the West Midlands.'

This book is completely idealistic and utopian. It provides both a romanticisation of the working class in defined neighbourhoods, and an emphasis on the community and 'community development', organisation and politics.

Seabrook seized enthusiastically on mass unemployment to bid farewell to the organised working class and its struggles and activity as the key to changing society. Instead he places all his political eggs and faith in the basket of this mythical community.

The book claims that workers' organisations are too weak to defend either the Welfare State or local services such as housing, education and social services, and denies that organised workers are the motive force in changing society. The new solution is the decentralisation of services and the creation of neighbourhoods and neighbourhood offices providing local government services answerable to and, to an extent, under the control of the community.

Seabrook states:

'The Neighbourhood Offices, by going back into the places where people live, suggest all kinds of questions that have been outlawed in the political debate that no longer envisages any possibility outside the workings of capitalism. For instance they pose questions about the nature of community and solidarity.'

Or, again:

'As long as Neighbourhood Offices can be seen as simply a mechanism for devolving limited services, they remain unthreatening, unlikely to radicalise people. But with the imagination and creative understanding of those who first conceived them, their growth and extension, their thrust into the heart of the alien ideology in whose shadow we all live, becomes a real living possibility.'

A very sizeable number of left Labour Party members, socialist militants organising in public sector, 'left councils', have made the pilgrimage to Walsall and are now seeking to implement variations or copies of decentralised services and Neighbourhood Offices. The most advanced decentralisation scheme is at present proposed by Islington.

I worked in Neighbourhood Offices in Walsall for three years from their inception in 1981. I do not commend it to others.

### Copy

Islington are attempting virtually a carbon copy of Walsall, albeit with more services decentralised and plush offices, in contrast to Walsall's prefabricated or shop frontage neighbourhood buildings. Twenty-four Neighbourhood Officer jobs are proposed at starting salaries of £13,000 per year. Yet we have recently been through a bitter 18 week long struggle for nursery workers in Islington over a staffing ratio and pay/grade claim which was promised to the nursery workers and ('the community') of Islington in the Labour election manifesto.

The comparison of Walsall's

neighbourhood concept with Islington's decentralisation scheme are a necessary and essential part of a critique, both of Seabrook's history of decentralisation in Walsall, and the political and ideal strategy and tactics contained and advocated in *The Idea of Neighbourhood*.

By decentralisation the Labour lefts in Islington hope to increase efficiency and create mass political involvement in the Council affairs. However for them the way to obtain this involvement is to join the Labour Party and work within its structures or be employed by them in a decentralised structure.

In Walsall housing services and repairs responded much more quickly and flexibly in a decentralised setting than did the previous centralised structure of service delivery. However, massive increases in budget and staff and technical workers enabled this to happen. Such increases are not envisaged by Islington, only the higher paid jobs.

For such a small book, Seabrook raises vast issues and problems and at the same time manages to mirror the current thinking and strategy of the local Labour left at present in control of Town Halls from Islington and Hackney to Sheffield and Liverpool. However, he prefers a propaganda job rather than a critique or even correct history of developments in Walsall. He consistently trots out the mythology constructed and faithfully recounted to him by the various members of the Labour Party he met in Walsall and the leaders who commissioned him to write this book.

What Seabrook does not examine, quite conveniently, is the contradictions of being both a socialist and a large local employer which are forced onto these representatives of the never-defined community. Examples of this have been catalogued quite extensively. Ask the residential workers in Southwark, nursery workers in Islington and more recently the housing workers threatened with suspension in Liverpool.

And what happens when a Labour Council like Walsall with its Neighbourhood Offices and Neighbourhood solidarity are faced with being voted out of office or cannot command a majority in the council chamber? They accept it: the organised workers in the Neighbourhood Offices are left to defend their jobs and services on their own.

This happened in Walsall in May 1982 and will happen again in different circumstances in many of the rate capped local authorities. When the anti-socialist coalition



**Socialist Worker XMAS CARDS**

Eight NEW cards taken from revolutionary socialist posters and cartoons—printed in red, yellow and black. Just the thing to counter the Xmas Blues

£1.50 for the set of eight (with envelopes) or 20p each

From all SWP branch bookstalls, or by post from Bookmarks, 265 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2DE

wanted to close neighbourhood offices and declare redundancies in Walsall, community opposition was strictly limited. Only the very real possibility of an all out strike and struggle to defend jobs and services services by the housing workers in NALGO prevented this.

But the last criticism of the book

and Seabrook's analysis has been provided by the example of the miners. Workers in a struggle defending jobs and communities can provide a base for other organised workers to launch solidarity action. ■

Steve Curley

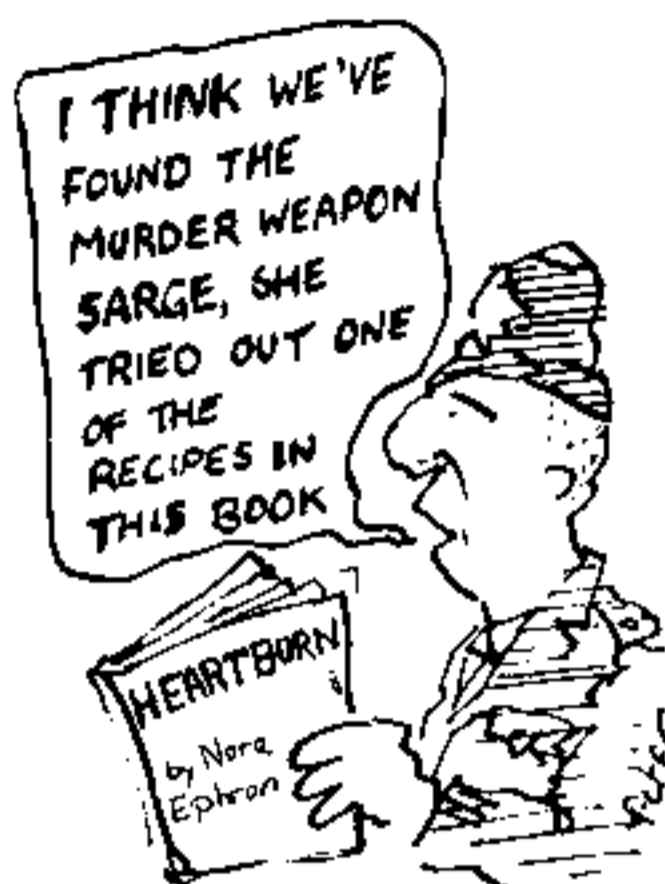
## Indigestible prose?

**Heartburn**  
Nora Ephron  
Pavanne £1.95

*HEARTBURN* is, apparently, a bestseller in New York and Washington. The reason for this has nothing to do with its merits as a novel, but has everything to do with the fact that it's written by Nora

Ephron, formerly married to investigative reporter Carl Bernstein. *Heartburn* is based on Bernstein's affair with another woman.

Carl Bernstein is, of course, half of the Woodward-Bernstein team which uncovered Watergate. He has a reputation for being a 'radical', so you would be forgiven



for thinking that his ex-wife's semi-autobiographical novel would reflect this.

Not at all. What is astonishing about the couple's life together is its sheer affluence. A house in

Washington, a country retreat, clothes, cars, expensive entertainments, taking the air shuttle between Washington and New York with no more thought than embarking on a 20p bus ride. And never does a political idea creep into the novel's 150-odd pages.

### Recipes

However, there is one redeeming feature about the book. The central character, Rachel, is a cookery book writer — and her recipes crop up throughout the book. So if you've always wanted to know how to make sorrel soup or lima beans with pears or a fail-safe way of boiling an egg so that the yolk is still soft without the white being runny and disgusting, then I suggest you sneak a look next time you're loitering in a station bookshop, but don't part with your money. ■

Harriet Sherwood

## Hill no Marxist

Dear Comrade,

While I agree with Alex Callinicos (issue 69) that we need to defend Christopher Hill against the vicious attacks of right wing historians, this very necessary united front should not lead us to bury or deny the differences between the Marxist method and other approaches to history.

The fact is that since Christopher Hill stopped believing that Marxism was crude, mechanical Stalinism some time in the mid 1950s, his approach has been totally eclectic, and in so far as he still has a theory of history it has become more and not less mechanical.

While in 1949 Hill believed that the root cause of the revolution was that 'there was a great deal of capital in England which merchants, yeomen and gentlemen were anxious to invest in the free-est possible industrial, commercial and agricultural development' (*The English Revolution, 1640*) by 1961 (*The Century of Revolution*) he had bowed to the prevailing fashion and attributed the leading role to the 'progressive gentry'. By 1969 his revised introduction to *The Good Old Cause* (originally written in collaboration with Edmund Dell in 1949) explained that:

"Bourgeois revolution" signifies a revolution which — whatever the subjective intentions of the revolutionaries — had the effect of establishing

conditions favourable to the development of capitalism.'

By 1980 he was arguing that the English revolution:

'was brought about neither by the wishes of the bourgeoisie, nor by the leaders of the Long Parliament ... it was the structures, fractures and pressures of the society rather than the wishes of leaders, which dictated the outbreak of revolution and shaped the state which emerged from it'. (J Peacock, ed *Three British Revolutions*).

This last position, which is nowadays held up to students as the last word on the Marxist school of history is particularly pernicious. It is not that there are not problems about the relationship between the economic process and class consciousness, but Hill's solution to these problems is to throw conscious revolutionary politics right out of the window. Why bother about political action at all? A 'Marxist' might as well resign from political activity altogether, get himself a top academic post, and victimise any of his students who happen to think that political activity is relevant and class struggle a reality. This is what Hill has done, and what makes Callinicos's apologies for him even more surprising is that Alex himself was once one of Hill's victimised students!

The attacks of the new right wing historical establishment in Britain and the USA (like Mark Kishlansky, who recently described Hill's subject matter as 'the cranks, crackpots, screwballs and fanatics, the nutters and kooks who appear in the wake of every genuine movement for social reform' *Times Higher Education Supplement* 7 September 1984) must be resisted. Hill has contributed a great deal of

exciting material to the study of our own ancestors, the radical movements that sought to make more than a bourgeois revolution in the 1640s. But that does not make him a Marxist, and the fact that he is generally taken for one of Britain's leading Marxist historians is (as in the case of Eric Hobsbawm) a hindrance to the growth and spread of Marxism, not a help. ■

Norah Carlin,  
London N9

## Red Home Guards

Dear SWR,

I hope that Charlie Hore's passing remarks in his book review 'Limited by Liberalism' (October SWR) on the subject of alternative defence strategies aren't reflective of a general SWP attitude on this subject, especially at the present time when CND is examining alternatives to nuclear arms.

The debate on alternative defence strategies is a perfect opportunity for revolutionary Marxists to advance proposals for a voluntary citizens' militia, to be promoted and supported actively by CND and established under the control of a committee made up of representatives of trade unions, local government bodies, professional associations, anti-nuclear groups such as CND and lastly Ministry of Defence officials. (Although we shouldn't make proposals for MoD inclusion it is inevitable that CND would.)

Training for this militia would be strictly technical, with either a ban on political indoctrination or freedom for all political tendencies to put their views to the militia. The militia would initially supplement the professional armed forces, but the second step would be to push for a similar democratisation of the professional forces too.

Obviously the ruling class will fight tooth and nail against any proposal remotely resembling this one, but its acceptance by CND would weaken the strongest right-wing argument against the anti-nuclear movement; that it is not interested in defending 'the country' from 'the Soviet threat'.

With luck a campaign for a citizens' militia would distract right-wing ideologues away from the Soviet threat to the 'threat within', so that we would be able to fight on terrain much more favourable to us. The fact that CND would be offering means to deal with the punitive Soviet threat could be disorienting for less politicised right-wing critics.

SWP objections to being involved in campaigns to defend 'the country', however correct theoretically, would be misguided. Any break by CND from patriotic slogans and patriotic politics will come empirically if it comes, not as a result of SWP harangues from the sidelines.

The appropriate response to alternative defence strategies for SWP members working in CND is not abstentionist sarcasm, but a clear-headed acceptance of the opportunities offered. This idea has already been touched on in Peter Binns' 'Missile Madness'. It should be taken up systematically. ■

W Hall,  
Athens.

## The great trouser scandal

Corruption and Misconduct

Alan Doig  
Penguin £4.95

GOD, this is a boring book. And we are not talking mild ennui. We are talking heavy duty tedium here. It took me three weeks to read the thing, and it seemed longer; much, much longer.

Which is a pity because the book's 380-odd unscintillating pages contain an enormous amount of information about corruption in British public life.

Some of Doig's examples are, to be frank, less than breathtaking. I mean, not many people know that in 1959 six Northampton councillors were fined £2 each for keeping tenants in a council house. But then not many people would want to know that. The Glasgow Dead Meat Scandal is every bit as exciting as it sounds. And Doig's account of the never-to-be-forgotten Great Army Trousers Scandal of 1919 doesn't really turn up anything new.

But at the other end of the scale Doig produces case after case to prove that the British state is worm-eaten with corruption. The civil service; the press, the church, industry; local government; parliament. They are all at it.

### Police corruption

But as you would expect corruption is most widespread among the police. Britain has the finest police force money can buy. Its almost reassuring to know they've never been any different. In 1829 the year the Metropolitan Police Act was passed, the House of Commons complained that 'there is hardly a felon committed who might not compound if he had enough money'. One hundred and fifty three years later in 1982 the Countryman Inquiry into the London police had to be aborted because it began to stumble across the sheer depths of corruption amongst the Met.

If every corrupt copper in London was sacked, there would quite literally no longer be a police force in the capital. The wonderful British bobby was for sale in 1829, and they are still for sale today. Only the price has changed.

The inescapable conclusion of Doig's book is probably best summed up by the great Andrew Cunningham when he said: 'All this sort of business goes on. If I'm corrupt then so is half the country'. Andy was right on both counts. He was certainly corrupt — he had his snout in John Poulson's trough — and so is a fair percentage of the British state.

But how could it ever be any different? As Andy Cunningham

knew under capitalism corruption is endemic. The system encourages the individual to get rich; that is the whole driving force of the capitalist economy after all. So when a CID officer or a local planning officer goes into business for himself, who's to blame him? He's only doing what Thatcher exhorts us all to do.

But Alan Doig can't quite bring himself to recognise this. He is perfectly aware how widespread corruption is, how it's officially tolerated by both the state and the press but he still can't come out and say it: that the police are bent because the system's twisted.

That same political fuzziness affects the book on another level. Despite all the detailed chapter and verse Doig musters to expose corruption, he is afflicted by a kind of political tunnel vision. For

example Doig documents the case of 8 Liverpool policemen convicted of receiving money from an illegal bookmaker in 1929. Fair enough. Except that Doig doesn't go on to say that for over a century the whole illegal gambling empire in this country was controlled by the police.

Or to use a more directly political example. Doig mentions the case of J H Thomas, the renegade Labour Cabinet minister who was disgraced in 1935 for revealing Budget secrets. For Doig that's a case of corruption and it no doubt was. But this is the same J H Thomas who just nine years earlier as leader of the National Union of Railwaymen had conspired with various members of the ruling class at sundry supper parties to sell out the General Strike. In Doig's book that isn't corruption.

Yet, in all probability Thomas wasn't actually paid for either crime, not least in hard currency. Because Thomas like so many Labour MPs before and since wasn't essentially corrupted by pound notes; he was bought by something far more insidious. By being gradually seduced away from his class and their problems and absorbed into the 'dolce vita' of the ruling classes. Doig can catalogue generations of politicians who've sold themselves body and soul; but he can't even begin to approach the much more fundamental forms of political corruption. The corruption that turned Hugh Scanlon into Lord Scanlon.

So this is at least half a good book. It is politically timid and too soft hitting; its style makes 'Exchange and Mart' seem like a masterpiece of English literature. But it is a serious book about a serious subject, and so I feel it can be read with profit. ■

Bob Light



## Impartial, neutral and objective

Organising Things: A guide to successful political action.

Sue Ward  
Pluto Handbooks £4.95

BEING asked to review this book is comparable to being forced to read a telephone directory.

The author claims that the book is a neutral guide to successful political activity. Whatever your politics it should be useful.

Checklists and information are provided on a wide range of activities, from producing a leaflet, to organising a demonstration.

However a guide to successful political action cannot be divorced from political aims. It's the politics that determines the organisation and not the other way round. The organisational tasks required for parliamentary socialism are

different to those for building workers' councils.

In attempting to be neutral, the book never puts an alternative to reformist methods of campaigning. The unstated assumption that all political action is respectable and aimed at public opinion at times makes the book extremely hilarious if not irritating.

But let the book speak for itself. We are told directories are a good place to look for addresses, and libraries a useful place for information. Cow Gum was invented by Henry Cow, not made of dead cows (no need to feel guilty when pasting up).

Pensioners could dress in leather jackets, crash helmets and borrow motor bikes to attract attention. Lots of people are prepared to dress up and act silly for a good cause.

When organising a demo the police may have sensible suggestions like how to avoid steep hills and traffic islands.

Royal weddings are not a good day to organise events; (funny, I remember a few good ones, when old jug head got spliced). Try not to have an all white, all male, all female platform (*shome mishtake surely—Ed*).

Finally the most useful tip of all, one close to all SWP members' hearts, the public meeting that flops, and we've all organised a few of those. Now there is no further need to worry — this book has the answer. Take a photograph of the speakers, not the empty chairs.

In the interests of studied neutrality and objectivity I neither recommend nor reject. ■  
Andy Strouthous